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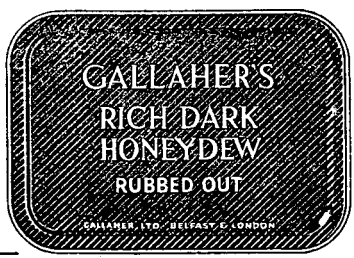

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

Vol. XX

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SIX prizes
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for Schools

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THE ARGOSY AWARD

The Argosy Award of £500 will be made to the writer of the best original short story submitted. Argosy's aim is to find and encourage new or as yet little-known writers. The Award is open to all authors (but is not designed for the established *professional* author.) It is particularly intended to attract young writers. A special prize of £50 will be given at the discretion of the Judges.

PRIZES FOR SCHOOLS. Special attention is drawn to School prizes. Six prizes of £25 will be awarded to entries from those at school: entrants of sixteen and upwards are eligible, and are also included within the range of the Award. Books to the value of £10 will be presented to the school attended by each winner.

STORIES of all kinds are eligible: there are no restrictions as to subject, background, or period.
Stories of Argosy calibre *with good plot structure, action, and characterisation* are more likely to appeal to the Judges than slight incidents or episodes. The first-rate story which Argosy readers expect and enjoy is the type of story to win the Award. Young competitors and new writers are advised to look at a recent issue of Argosy.

LENGTH is a matter for the writer. A well-told story fixes its own length, but extremes should be avoided. A story of 12,000 words would have to be exceptionally good, and one of, say, only 1,000 words superlatively good, to win the Award. From 3,000 to 6,000 words is perhaps the most practical length.

ENTRIES must be submitted on or before December 31st 1959. The announcement of the Award will be made in the May number of Argosy, published April 8th. The Editor may offer to purchase entries which reach Argosy standard.

JUDGES include **H. E. BATES**
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THE ARGOSY AWARD

Conditions of Entry

1 Each story submitted must be clearly typed, in double spacing, on one side of the paper only. Your full name and permanent address in BLOCK CAPITALS must appear on the front page of your story, with the following signed statement: **I declare this story to be my own original work.**
Your surname should appear at the head of each succeeding page. (If at school, please give the name and address of the school as well as your home address.) If you enter two or more stories, they must be sent enclosed together.

2 All stories must be sent **by post,** clearly addressed and correctly stamped, to: THE ARGOSY AWARD,
3 PILGRIM STREET, LONDON, E.C.4 (COMP.)
Typescripts must reach this address not later than **Thursday, December 31st 1959, the closing date.**

3 All entrants between the ages of 16 and 30 are asked to give their age on the front page of their story. (You must be at least 16 years of age to qualify for the Award.)

4 All stories entered for the Award must be unpublished work, written in English. (MSS. submitted in previous Argosy competitions are ineligible and should not be sent in again.)

5 Stories will not be returned unless an adequately stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed—allowing for registered post if desired. (Overseas entrants at long distance are advised to send their stories by air mail; in their case, return postage must be tendered by money order or International Coupon to the required value, but may be at surface rate.)

6 While every care will be taken to ensure the safe return of manuscripts, Argosy will not be responsible in any circumstances for loss, damage or delay in the post or otherwise, and no correspondence will be entered into on this or any other matter concerning the competition.

7 The winner of the Award will be required to assign all rights in the winning story to Argosy.

8 If the Editor of Argosy considers that none of the stories submitted merits the Award, the Award will not be made. The decision of the Judges, and of the Editor of Argosy in all other matters affecting this competition, will be final and legally binding.

9 Employees (and their families) of both the printers and proprietors of Argosy and of associated companies, are not eligible to compete.

★ ☆ ★ ☆ ★

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THREE OF CASTILE

Under the rising moon
they danced their way to the main road

BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

THEY were big, worn men, still young if one looked closely. In distance they had not come very far, some twenty miles by bus and four more on their rope sandals. They had travelled much farther in time—out of black industry and back to boyhood in the green and silent valleys on the high border of Old Castile.

The Cock, the Monk, and the Fly had fulfilled the very vague intentions with which they started out. They were three dockers from the wharfs of Bilbao, proud of their strength—since they had nothing much else to be proud of—and dryly aware that they were only willing animals whom society would feed reluctantly when that strength was gone.

It was a public holiday. Random buses had taken them from tavern to tavern. A rolling walk over the soft summer dust of a hill track landed them, with brand new evening thirst, in the village of Agudas. The dark Rioja at the single wineshop was cheap. Each of them trickled half a litre of it straight down his throat from the porron.

Dancing in the plaza had begun, but was half-hearted. There were more girls than men. Younger sons left the village for the towns of the Ebro or the iron foundries of Bilbao. So the arrival of strangers was a welcome event, though very properly disguised by the contemptuous glances and pretended laughter of the girls.

El Moscon—the Fly—effected the introductions. He was persistent. That was how he got his nickname.

El Fraile—the Monk—suggested respectability. He was broad, snub-nosed, and looked—to the unreliable optimism of the female eye—as if he might make a humorous and kindly husband.

El Gallo—the Cock—who was tall and graceful with straight black hair, provided romance. He had the shyness of the athlete, and preferred that his routine of physical labour and drink should be uncomplicated by women. But once supplied

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with these desirable and explosive comforts his reactions were incalculable.

They were three excellent little girls. No denying it. Fair-haired and muscular, modest with their rotundities in front and glorying in those behind. They crowned the day. They belonged to the hills as irrevocably as the dockers' usual girls—when they could afford any—belonged to the rubbish dump at the back of the power station.

El Gallo, full of a momentary passion for all he was not, took refuge in imagination.

"Tomorrow," he announced, "we are off to Cape Town."

"Are you a sailor?"

"I? I am the First Officer of the *Artxanda Mendi*. And my friends here . . ."

El Gallo hesitated a second while he looked at them through the noble haze of wine and affection. The immense forearms and the responsible face of El Fraile at once suggested the right profession. "My friend is the Chief Engineer. And this other is his second."

"It is a big ship?"

"Neither too big nor too small, like you who are as high as my heart. Five thousand tons. And to think we sail tomorrow!"

"I have never been on a ship," said the prettiest of the three girls, whom El Moscon had annexed, "nor have any of us."

"Then come and see one! You shall all go down the river with us, and we will land you with the pilot at Portugalete."

"It is not certain we sail tomorrow," said El Fraile, giving him a kick under the table. "It could be next week. The captain told me."

"Tomorrow at midday!" El Gallo shouted. "Nothing is more certain!"

And certain it was. For three days their gang had loaded the *Artxanda Mendi* with iron rails, awkward and dangerous in the slings. Shortly after midday she would go down the River Nervion on the first of the ebb.

The Cock's fantasy was possible. If he had ever learnt to read easily, what he claimed could have been true. There was no class difference of speech, and little of dress, to give him away. A Basque ship's officer who had drifted out to Agudas on a public holiday would have worn, like the three dockers, a beret, a bright single-coloured shirt buttoned up at the collar without a tie, and even blue trousers and rope sandals. The red sash at the waist was improbable, but he might have put it on if he was homesick for the mountains and looking for simple fun in a village square.

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The Monk and the Fly caught the infection. When they had listened to themselves long enough, they believed themselves. Ship's routine, at any rate in harbour, was second nature to them and they had drunk with enough seamen in their time to be familiar with foreign ports. Girls and men were charmed by these technicians of the sea returning so genially to the haunts and ways of their youth. In the moonlight Agudas was turned into a paradise of free wine, continually reappearing in the empty jug. A little before midnight the three dockers danced their way to the main road.

When they awoke in a dry ditch and peered over the edge of it at Bilbao and the steep valley of the Nervion, they had some vague memory of a sympathetic acquaintance who had given them a lift in his oxcart and discharged them above the town. It was seven in the morning. They walked automatically down to the port gates and checked in for work.

Since they could hold their liquor and had slept on clean weeds they were not in such a nightmare condition as the rest of the gang who were to unload the *Florinda*, up from Vigo with general cargo and in the next berth to the *Artxanda Mendi*. Their heads were beyond being disturbed by the rattle of derricks, the startling coughs of steam capstans, and the stench of the dried cod which powdered them with nauseous, grey dust.

They lowered their backs for loads and carried them. It was easier to work than not to work.

At ten o'clock there was a break. El Gallo looked in his pockets and sash. "Any money?" he asked.

"Not a perra chica," answered El Fraile.

"And you, Moscon?"

The Fly ran nervous hands over his spare, wiry body as if he was cleaning his wings. As a forlorn hope he looked for a lost copper coin in his sandals. "Nothing."

"We were robbed?"

"Perhaps in our sleep."

After an interval for thought El Fraile said, "We spent it."

"Women?"

"We were in the mountains!" El Moscon protested virtuously.

"Haven't we enough for a bread?"

"Nothing."

"Women!" El Gallo complained. "Without doubt!"

"There were not."

"But there was dancing."

"Perhaps. It was a fiesta. What I would give for coffee and a bread!"

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El Gallo shook his shining, black crest and stirred it with his fingers. "We could not have been dancing alone," he said.

"You were. On the road."

"The road from where?"

"Agudas!" shouted El Moscon triumphantly.

"It comes back to me," said El Gallo, as one recovering a dream.

"And nothing would content you but to be mate of that black bitch there."

"It's true I have imagination."

"You should be on a newspaper!"

"What are we to do if they come to the ship?" asked El Fraile, wrinkling the leather of his anxious, clerical forehead which had also fitted the part of Chief Engineer.

"They won't."

"Won't they? Look at it, man—all three together with leave from their mothers! Why not? Why shouldn't they come? A ride in the ship, and off with the pilot. Nothing more reasonable. In their best clothes and all pinti-painted!"

"It won't be the first time we've made a date with women and not turned up," El Moscon reminded them.

"But they are not women!" roared El Gallo.

"True. They are not, so to say, women."

"We must see the First Officer," said El Fraile seriously.

"And how the devil are we going to see the First Officer? Whoever heard of three dockers calling on the First Officer? And if the foreman catches us looking round the cabins of the *Artxanda Mendi*—"

"He knows very well that we are honest."

"Perhaps. But he knows we could have no honest reason for being there."

"The mate is bound to go on shore. We might catch him."

"Knock off," El Gallo ordered, "all three to the gates!"

"And how do we eat?" asked El Fraile, foreseeing the certain result of deserting their gang in the middle of an urgent job.

"Eating has nothing to do with it," El Gallo said. "This is a point of honour."

He rose from the pile of straw on which the three were reclining, hitched his beret over one ear, and approached the foreman. "We're off," he said, "with apologies. A private affair, capataz."

The foreman looked up into the impudent face, hollowed and etched by dissipation and hunger. "If you want a drink, Gallo, get it! Back in ten minutes, and I say nothing."

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El Moscon searched his usually fertile brain for a convincing excuse. He was too tired. He could think of nothing but an aunt's funeral. It would not do. "I'll tell you the truth, capataz," he said. "We can't help it."

"An affair of delicacy," El Fraile explained.

"I spit on your delicacies! Listen, Fraile, you are a responsible man! I know that none of you three has a penny after a fiesta. Do you want to starve? If you let me down now when we have to empty the *Florinda* I must make up the gang and there'll be no work for you for a week."

"We could work down in the holds," El Fraile suggested to his companions. "They won't see us there."

"Who won't see you? What's up? Trouble with the police?" the foreman asked.

"Them? They don't mix it with me!" the Cock crowed, and turned to El Fraile. "You—haven't you got any sense? It's not a question of being seen or not being seen. We have to meet a certain person at the gates."

"True," answered El Fraile. "I had forgotten. Our excuses, capataz, but there is no remedy."

They slouched off, responding with quite unnatural politeness to the threats and curses of the puzzled foreman.

Outside the gates they leaned wearily against a truck and watched the brisk traffic of men who had breakfasted—clerks, seamen, agents, and customs officers.

They had not long to wait.

The First Officer of the *Artxanda Mendi* strolled out through the gates. The hatch covers were on and he had time for a last taste of the shore before the turn of the tide. He had the same gallant build and colouring as El Gallo, though shorter and not so gaunt. "No hands wanted," he said automatically.

The three approached him, and he recognised them as belonging to the gang of labourers who had loaded his ship.

"What do *you* want?"

"A word with your lordship. Nothing more," said El Fraile with most formal courtesy.

The First Officer was held by his air of solidity. "Well? But it's no good coming to me with complaints. See the agent of the Line!"

El Gallo was silent. Face to face with the man he resembled and might have been, he was shy.

El Moscon started to talk. Even by walking on there was no getting rid of him. The mate was reminded of the persistence of touts on the Buenos Aires waterfront.

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"Bueno, hombre, bueno," he said at last, "but come to the point! What the devil do you three want?"

"A favour," El Gallo replied bluntly. "A favour that we have no right to ask, being poor. But it has nothing to do with work or money."

El Gallo's dignity had stopped the mate in his stride uphill from the river. He met the docker's eyes and turned impulsively across the street into a wineshop.

"Sit down. I am listening."

El Fraile began the tale of their romeria through the villages, and put over very well—though more by tone and gesture than any richness of vocabulary—the beauty of the dusk and of Agudas.

"So, you see, what with the wine and so sympathetic a society—but no doubt you have done the same yourself."

The First Officer had.

"Three cups for the gentlemen," he ordered. "And what then?"

"It so happened," El Gallo confessed, "that in the enthusiasm of the moment, and without the least disrespect to yourself, I said I was the First Officer of the *Artxanda Mendi*."

"Hombre! But there's no harm done. No doubt with a little study of navigation you would be as good as myself."

"If it was only that! But this exaggeration—I told it to three girls."

"I had already guessed as much."

"And these gentlemen, my friends—I swore that El Fraile here was Chief Engineer and El Moscon his second."

"Without asking so much as by your leave," added El Fraile.

"You didn't deny it," El Gallo accused him.

"One might as well deny God Almighty to a priest."

"I see that the situation got out of hand," said the mate sympathetically. "But what does it matter?"

"If it was only that!" repeated El Gallo. "It's that we invited the girls to visit the ship."

"And to go downriver as far as the mouth," El Moscon wailed dramatically.

"They are very pretty, very well brought up," said El Fraile in his most fatherly manner. "We cannot think of them going back to their village in tears and saying they made the trip to Bilbao for nothing."

"If it depended on me, amigos, you could come on board dressed up as admirals! But the captain would object."

"We weren't going to propose that! No, hombre, something much less! Would it be possible for your lordship to say that

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the officers have been changed, that we had to go to Cadiz by the first train this morning?"

"And that we explained the matter to you, and begged you to entertain them?"

"But you don't have to see them again!" the First Officer laughed.

"I know," El Gallo agreed. "And if they were women I wouldn't mind ditching them. But they are three decent little girls of our own sort."

"A point of honour," El Moscon explained.

"Of delicacy," El Fraile corrected him.

"They have never been on a ship, you say?"

"You would not believe how excited they were!" said El Gallo. "And the eldest is already seventeen."

There was a moment's silence. Never to have stood on a deck seemed to all four men as astonishing as never to have ridden in bus or train.

"You will take another cup?" El Moscon invited.

That had to be said. He could only pray that an unknown proprietor would give credit.

"I have to be on duty. So if you will excuse me . . ."

"When you return from Cape Town, then."

"With great pleasure when I return from Cape Town. Well, amigos," said *Artxanda Mendi*'s mate, getting up, "the foreman will be waiting for you."

"We are not working today."

"But the *Florinda*?" asked the First Officer, who had observed how his companions wolfed the little saucers of entremeses which came with the wine. "She is in need of a full gang and another if they could get it."

"It was more important to see you."

"You are from Castile?"

"From Old Castile."

"Don't worry. I will do what I can."

The Cock, the Monk, and the Fly crossed the bridge over the River Nervion and aimlessly plodded down the road opposite the wharfs. Without work or any spirit of holiday rest they had time to feel their tiredness. They did not go far—a safe distance downstream from the *Artxanda Mendi*—and then climbed the steep hillside. They found an uncomfortable nest among the rocks from which they could look over the roofs of the narrow belt of houses.

It was the top of the tide. There were rolling clouds beneath the surface of the river as the fresh water coming down from the

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mountains stirred yellow sediment. The *Artxanda Mendi*, which had seemed a mere slab of iron among the tracery of cranes and masts and signal gantries, was suddenly in the middle of the stream—a graceful black-and-white arrow aimed straight at them until she turned to port on to her course for Portugalete and the open sea.

She came abreast of them, and they heard the four clangs of the engine-room telegraph as the First Officer rang from Dead Slow to Slow Ahead. She was gallant with house flag and code flags, saluting the yard where she was built, and the Spanish ensign at the stern.

On the bridge were three more bright patches of colour, so close together that they were probably holding hands in alarm at so many strange men so very occupied, with no time for more than swift explanation and the occasional warm word of courtesy.

El Fraile, sitting motionless, hands clasped round his knees, watched with paternal approval.

"They are there!" shouted El Moscon. "All three of them. On the bridge!"

El Gallo lay on his stomach with his head on his arms. He half turned for a single glance.

"Of course they are there. Let me sleep, Moscon. I am hungry."

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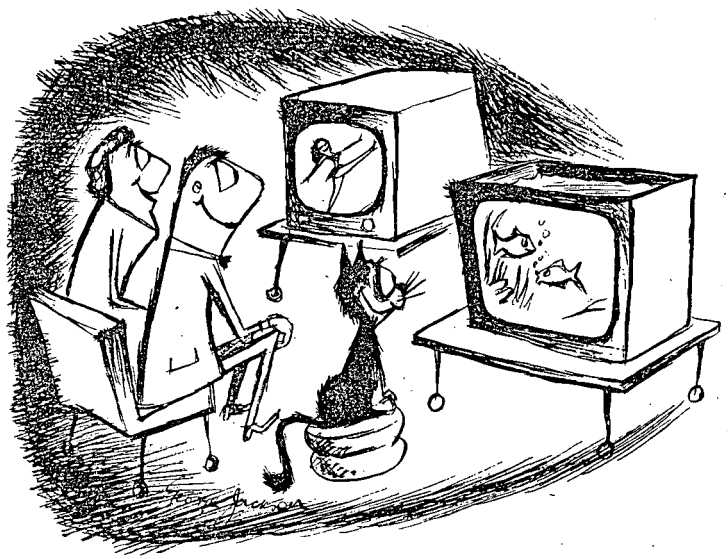

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NIGHT FLIGHT

With a desperate roar,
the propeller tore at the air

BY BARRY JOYNSON CORK

IN spite of all arrangements to the contrary, Group Captain H. D. Messenger, D.S.O., D.F.C., spent that afternoon playing golf. He played with none of his staff from the training wing, nor did he follow his customary routine on Wednesday afternoons and play with his usual rival, Sir Edgar Batson, the local J.P.

Instead he drove twenty-five miles to a club where he was not known, fixed himself up by chance with a chartered accountant whose partner had let him down, and finished the afternoon two up against an opponent whose handicap was five against his own fifteen. Harry Messenger then devoted some time to drinking beer in the bar and felt all the better for it.

He considered that with any luck his wife would never know where he had been. Even though she had looked at him with her disconcertingly steady grey eyes over her coffee cup that morning and said, " You won't forget you're going to see Dr. Arnotts again today? "

He stared out over the garden of the Officer Commanding the Training Wing's married quarters and answered, " No, darling, I won't forget."

" You're glad you went, aren't you? He really is doing you some good? "

His eyes still on the garden, Harry Messenger had said, " Hard to tell. I suppose it's a bit early yet."

" But you said you liked him."

" Oh, I like him all right," Harry had agreed. " Nice chap. Maybe I'm just not the type to pour out my subconscious from a head-shrinker's couch. Dangerous, too. I don't imagine the Air Ministry would be exactly delighted if they knew one of their station commanders was going round the bend."

He wished he hadn't said that because Marjorie had bitten her lip before saying quietly, " I'm sorry if you think I talked you into it. But you know it's the only way."

He had experienced a sudden urge to add that he wished to

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God he'd never told her about it all in the first place. But he'd said nothing, and now he was rather glad. The thing that was worrying him was something that no woman—not even Marjorie—could ever understand. Which wasn't surprising when even the Harley Street psychiatrist with a string of letters after his name had turned out to be no bloody good. Nothing had seemed any good until now.

"No, you don't have to lie on a couch," the little man behind the big desk had said. It had been the previous Wednesday afternoon. "Just talk. Have a cigarette and just talk to me about yourself."

"It won't take long," Harry said. "I never saw anything nasty in the woodshed and I didn't loathe my mother. Nothing like that."

The psychiatrist looked at him.

Harry had gone on grimly, "So far as you're concerned there's nothing to find. I *know* what's troubling me and I know what started it. You see, I command the R.A.F. station at Blaneham. Which is where I got my wings in 1941."

"Go on," Dr. Arnotts said.

"There's damn little to tell, as a matter of fact. I was an earnest sort of youth. Dead keen to fight Jerry and all that, but no particular talent. Not like some on the course. There were half a dozen cadets who were born pilots—same way you say a rider's got good hands. Born pilots and quite mad." He'd hesitated, trying to put it all into words.

"Flying their planes under a local bridge was the fashionable thing. Strictly forbidden, of course, but it was supposed to prove something."

"And this escapade was something you couldn't do?"

Harry said slowly, "*Wouldn't* was the word I used then. I've told you I was dead earnest and I wanted to finish the course. They asked me to beat up the bridge with them one night and I got a bit pious and wouldn't go. They—well, they all got caught."

"What happened to them?"

"They got a hell of a rocket and were pushed back down the course. So I ended up with my wings about two months ahead of them and none of them ever caught up. Naturally, some of them got killed. But the ones that didn't rather missed the gold rush while I was getting to be a squadron leader at twenty-one. Just because I wouldn't fly under that damn bridge."

"Or couldn't," Dr. Arnotts had said.

To give him his due he'd got it in one, Harry had to admit that to himself. "Yes, that's it. And the trouble is I just can't

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remember now whether I genuinely thought the whole thing was silly or not."

He'd sat silently, waiting, listening to the clock ticking on the wall.

"Does it matter all that much now?"

"Yes, it does." Harry looked at the man across the desk. "You see I *know* those boys were better natural pilots than I was. Some were killed, as I said. Then, at the end of the war some went out. But one stayed on in the service—a type called Johnnie Bertram. And now he and I are in the running for the same job."

Dr. Arnotts raised his eyebrows. "I thought that the Air Ministry made up your minds for you."

"They do," Harry had agreed. "Only this doesn't happen to involve the Air Ministry. Bertram and I are both considering leaving the service. This job is with one of the big airlines." Then he added quickly, "You see how it is? If I try for the job I can't help the advantage my present rank and record will give me. Whereas if I don't apply—"

"You'll have made amends for a possible act of cowardice that proved advantageous to you many years ago." Dr. Arnotts leaned back in his chair. "My dear Group Captain, your medal ribbons alone show that you're no coward."

"Perhaps later—no; but I'm worrying about a time before that."

"A sense of unworthiness . . . an obsession devoted to an act of proving oneself is by no means unusual. Particularly when someone like yourself has shouldered heavy responsibility while still young."

The psychiatrist had scribbled notes on a piece of paper. "Well, I think when you come to see me next week—"

There wasn't going to be a next week, Harry Messenger thought. The trick cyclist might be able to do something in due course, though that was something he personally doubted very much. But at the moment there simply wasn't time.

It was growing dusk when he left the club house and found his car. So far as Marjorie knew, he'd spent the afternoon in Harley Street and would be at his club for a couple of hours. There was no need to rush things. He started the engine and drove unhurriedly to a small grass-runwayed flying club about thirty miles away.

There he parked the car and made his way to the broken-down hut by the side of the airfield—a tall, smoothly-moving man in his early forties, inconspicuous in casual golf clothes.

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To the bearded, tweed-coated occupant of the ramshackle office he said, " Hullo, Mac. I want a plane."

" Lord, it's Harry." The part owner of the not very successful flying club waved a large hand in welcome. They had known each other for years. He asked hopefully, " Does this mean I'm now subcontracting to the R.A.F.? Because if it does maybe I can afford some new planes."

" Strictly for pleasure," Harry Messenger said. He leaned on the office wall and lit a cigarette as he produced a worn folder from his pocket. " You'd better have a look at my papers, but I've kept my civil licence up to date." Then, while the other glanced through the documents, " What have you got and how much do you charge? "

" Four-ten an hour private flying on Moths. Five for the Proctor." The bearded man handed the folder back. " Or seeing it's you, the same price for my own Chipmunk."

" I'll take a Moth," Harry said.

" Well, you can't go far unless you're making a point to point trip. We've no night-flying facilities here and it'll be dark in an hour."

It was surprising how smoothly one could lie when one had to, Harry found. He said, " I'll be spending the night with the R.A.F. at Wrotham. There's a party on. Can't really justify using a service aircraft and it's a hell of a way by road."

The bearded man shrugged his shoulders. " Well, I'm damned if I'd pay for my own aircraft if I was a Group Captain, but who am I to worry? Won't keep you a minute." He picked up a telephone.

Waiting by the side of the little airfield, Harry Messenger told himself that it was all going very well. He heard Mac Summers give the orders for a Moth to be run out, and hang up the phone saying, " Any hour now." Then, unexpectedly, " You know Edgar Batson, don't you? "

Harry nodded, wondering what was coming next.

" The old bastard's been moaning about low flying again. If you could tell him to pipe down I'd be obliged."

" You can't tell Sir Edgar anything," Harry said. " At least not about being a J.P."

" I know," Mac agreed moodily. " He's got a house slap opposite Ullingford bridge. I'm told he keeps a pair of Zeiss night-glasses at the ready so that he can spot the number of anyone who tries beating up the town. You'd better warn your boys."

" My boys know it's more than their lives are worth," Harry said bleakly.

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A pair of night-glasses ready to hand was a nice prospect, he thought. If the local J.P. got his number he was going to be very positively for the high jump. But he wanted everything to be the same—to have an element of risk. What in hell was he complaining about?

Mac broke into his thoughts. "Here's the Moth coming now. I'd better lend you a helmet."

"I suppose you had." Harry had forgotten the helmet. He hoped very much he hadn't forgotten anything else.

They went out to the grass airfield and got on with it. It was a long time since he'd sat in a Moth. Even though he'd kept his hand in with light planes he'd forgotten the old ones could be so crude.

He strapped himself into the rear of the two cockpits and looked out along the unfamiliar twin wings apparently held together with bracing wires. Automatically he heard himself repeating the half-forgotten drill to the mechanic standing by the propeller.

"Switches on."

"Switches on."

"Contact."

"Contact."

The old Gipsy-Major engine fired with a cough and a roar and he trundled the machine out on to the centre of the runway, opening the throttle and feeling the tail-skid biting and kicking at the grass before it lifted; and all at once the wheels came unstuck and he was airborne. Harry circled the flying club once in the gathering dusk.

Then he picked up his direction from the railway line and headed the Moth's nose for Ullingford.

It was dark by the time Messenger reached the bridge. He studied it briefly, noting the familiar sweep of the river where the water reflected back the faint light of the hazy moon and the dark patches made by the trees. Automatically he glanced at the luminous dial of his watch and then at the altimeter in front of him.

Nine o'clock and eleven hundred feet.

He pushed gently at the old Moth's rudder bar and started a big circle as a preliminary to his run in, noting with satisfaction as he did so that the hand on the control column in front of him felt steady enough now the time had come.

Sitting in the cramped open cockpit with the wind rushing past his flying-helmet he found himself actually enjoying the steady blare of the ancient Gipsy engine in his ears. The really worrying

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part was over because it wasn't necessary for him to think any more.

For the first time in months he knew exactly what he was going to do.

The lights had come on in the town below him now and he checked his position again. If he didn't make a wide enough circle, Harry thought, he'd end up at an angle to the bridge and that wasn't going to be funny at all. He glanced out over his port wing and saw that the crude spring which registered air speed was quivering at about sixty miles an hour, and in spite of himself he grinned. One rather tended to forget there were still aircraft that could fly that slow.

Now where was the bridge? He shifted his gaze and discovered it beneath his left shoulder. That was better. At all costs he didn't want to lose sight of the damn thing. All he needed was a certain amount of altitude and a straight run in . . .

Harry climbed steadily for a while, knowing that to anyone in Ullingford the sound of his engine would be dying in the distance. Not until he was satisfied that he was three miles away with the bridge at his back did he bank round on his course and head the way he had come.

With considerable care he lined up the whirling blades of the propeller with a pinpoint of light he recognised as Sir Edgar Batson's house. The bridge would be in front of that. Abruptly he cut the switches to both magnetos and the steady beat of the engine stopped with frightening suddenness. Very gently Harry eased the stick forward.

Silently, save for the whistle of the wind on the bracing wires, he began to glide.

It was extraordinarily peaceful, Harry found. He had never tried his hand at gliding before, and for the first time he began to realise some of the fascination of the sport.

A few moments before the Moth had been a thing of canvas and metal, literally fighting its way through the air. Now that was all changed. The air that sighed softly round him was no longer an enemy. Incredibly, he found himself hearing the whistle of a train rushing across the darkness of the countryside down below.

And he could see the bridge.

Harry eased the stick a little farther forward and wondered if he was going to have enough height to do the job. He was over the river now, swooping through the darkness like a great bat. He toyed with the trimmers, willing the whole of his concentration to the single effort of keeping the aircraft straight. Mercifully, there was hardly any wind and what little there was

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seemed to be blowing straight in his face. Well, it all helped. No side winds, no engine torque. No drift. It was as simple as that. And the bridge was all at once clear and distinct.

God, Harry thought, but the single arch looked small. He realised that he was sweating. But that was concentration—effort of a sort. Nothing to do with fear. Curiously, he seemed to feel nothing at all.

How far away now? Four hundred yards. He glanced down. Probable altitude seventy-five feet. Stick forward some more. At what speed did a Moth stall? Three hundred yards. Two . . .

"Now!" Harry said to the dark night that was his world. He snapped on the switches with a single quick movement and the silence split open with a roar as the engine caught. Suddenly alive again, the Moth gripped the air under power, twisted, and came under the control of its pilot's hands.

The bridge rocked towards them, the arch looking madly, murderously small and then suddenly large, and Harry was under, his ears aching with the engine blast thrown back from the brickwork.

And then he saw the power lines.

For a fraction of a second that seemed to drag on into minutes, Harry stared at the smooth, symmetrical loops of high tension cables that hung suspended from pylons on each side of the river bank. His first reaction was indignation, because the cables were a hazard that had not been there before. At least, not in 1941.

Then, fleetingly, he cursed himself for a fool. Why in hell had he taken it for granted nothing had been changed? Flying under the bridge at all was bad enough. To take the local geography for granted was the act of a madman.

Of their own accord his hands kept the Moth where she was, forcing down the urge to climb.

The vast, solid bulk of Batson's house loomed ahead, perched on its private hill like a castle.

The whole trick of getting under the bridge and home alive was to climb and bank the instant the arch was passed. But now—

The cables leapt towards and over him like vast silver threads. Harry had a wild, horrifying moment in which he found himself staring at the trees in Batson's garden, at the curtains in the lighted windows. One of them framed some sort of potted plant.

He kicked over the left rudder, slammed the throttle wide open, and dragged the stick back as he headed for safety of altitude.

With a desperate roar the propeller tore at the air, held it,

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and seemed to pull the aircraft along behind. The Moth climbed, and at six hundred feet Harry blinked the sweat out of his eyes and levelled off, heading back to his base. The moon was clearing now and he reckoned he could land a Moth well enough in the dark.

He could tell Mac in the morning that he hadn't gone to Wrotham after all, that he'd changed his mind. He wriggled his shoulders uncomfortably, feeling flat—terrible. All elation gone.

All he could really feel were the lenses of Edgar Batson's night-glasses boring up into the dark of the night.

"How did it go?" Marjorie Messenger asked. She was standing by the fireplace, looking cool and very lovely as she poured the drinks.

"All right," Harry said. He took his drink gratefully, trying not to show quite how much he needed it. He said, "I think I'm cured."

For the first time he thought about it and realised that he was. If he could get that job ahead of Johnnie he was going to. He was as good a man and always had been.

He didn't owe Wing Commander Bertram a damn thing.

Abruptly and coldly Harry found himself realising that the chances were that now there wouldn't be any job. It was inconceivable that Batson hadn't seen him and got his number, and he couldn't bring himself to imagine what the Air Ministry were going to say about a Group Captain of forty who suddenly decided to do illegal night flights under a low bridge. Forfeiture of all seniority at least. Far more likely that he'd be cashiered. Harry thought, Oh you bloody, *bloody* fool.

And Marjorie would live all her life and never understand.

She was saying, "Dr. Arnotts seems to have made a pretty quick cure."

"Yes," Harry said. He desperately wanted to change the conversation. "What have you been doing today?"

Marjorie said calmly, "Nothing much. I had a long talk on the phone with Edgar Batson this evening."

"You what?"

"Had a talk with Edgar Batson. About the fête. Kept him glued to the phone for about an hour."

There was a silence. Then Harry said, "What time did you ring?"

"I started talking about nine o'clock."

Harry drew a deep breath before he asked, "Did he—leave the phone at all?"

"He tried to. He was babbling about wanting to see

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something that was going on outside, but I told him he was being difficult, and I wouldn't let him go." She sipped her sherry thoughtfully. "He was rather cross."

Her husband said with difficulty, "I bet he was."

"Did you lose your way or something?" She looked at him coolly with her steady grey eyes. "Darling, I heard you go over, you know. According to my reckoning you were late by a good quarter of an hour."

Harry looked at her. Then he said very slowly, "How in hell did you know?"

She smiled at him and Harry realised that he might know some day, but not now. Then she stopped smiling and said seriously, "And now you're better? Truly, truly better?"

He nodded, not fully understanding but knowing that it was so.

"I'm so glad," Marjorie Messenger said.

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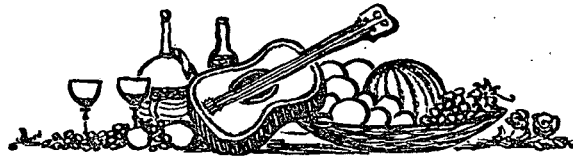
★ ★ ★

FRUIT AND WINE

Marble is veined as leaves and fruit
is sliced ripe into crackleware dishes
bottles can twist a room into their
cool cylinders and knives shine like oil
slicing porcelain fruit into the
suave dishes the light is ripe
and the linen cloth crisp to fingers
on the grained wood and the marble
veined like the leaves in the leaning
tall vase has a shape of jonquils
O glorious the bread is crust and crumb
to be cut by the steel knife with the horn
handle and eaten with pear
and grape and pomegranate
by the smooth light of the marble
the wood the glass the linen the leaves and
all the patterned dark of their shadows.

M. K. JOSEPH, *Braque*



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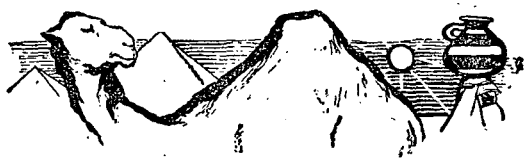
Hump Room



Honour Your Partners

Lady Montdore loved anybody royal. It was a genuine emotion, quite disinterested, since she loved them as much in exile as in power, and the act of curtsying was the consummation of this love. Her curtsies, owing to the solid quality of her frame, did not recall the graceful movement of wheat before the wind. She scrambled down like a camel, rising again backside foremost like a cow, a strange performance, painful it might be supposed to the performer, the expression on whose face, however, belied this thought. Her knees cracked like revolver shots but her smile was heavenly.

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*

Old-fashioned Waltz

There was a merry dromedary
Waltzing on the plain;
Dromedary waltzing, dromedary prancing.
And all the people said, it is a sign of rain,
When they saw the good beast dancing.

SARAH GRAND, *The Heavenly Twins*

Needled through the Eye of a Camel

When we stopped for lunch, Halide, who has done quite a lot of work among mental cases, looked at the camel closely, and into its eyes, and watched the way its mouth worked while it chewed, and said, "Has it had mental trouble before? For I think that it now has."

Aunt Dot said that she believed that camels usually had a certain amount of this, they were born with it, and without it they would never lead the peculiar lives they did, but her camel had, she thought, not yet been actually round the bend . . .

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Halide, still observing the camel, said, " It certainly looks odd."

" It looks odd because it *is* odd," said aunt Dot. " Camels are." She thought this settled the matter, but of course it did not, because the point about a camel (as about a human) is, is it odder than other camels, or other humans?

Halide said, " I fear we may have trouble with this animal. It ought to see a psychiatrist, or even an alienist. I am nearly sure, my dear Dot, that it is not quite right in its head."

But aunt Dot only said, " No camel is."

ROSE MACAULAY, *The Towers of Trebizond*

Pachydermis

The bus to Marrakech, Morocco,
Traverses landscapes simply socko.
The agricultural economy
Suggests the Book of Deuteronomy.
The machine has not replaced the mammal,
And everything is done by camel.
I hope I never learn what flesh
I ate that day in Marrakech,
But after struggling with a jawful
I thought it tasted humpthing awful.

OGDEN NASH, *Morocco*

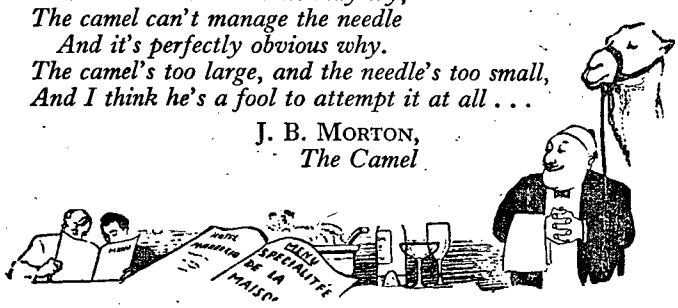
Fact . . .

A dromedary can travel 100 miles in one day at an average pace of 10 miles per hour and live for five days without water.

. . . Fancy

No matter how hard he may wheedle,
No matter how hard he may try,
The camel can't manage the needle
And it's perfectly obvious why.
The camel's too large, and the needle's too small,
And I think he's a fool to attempt it at all . . .

J. B. MORTON,
The Camel



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Hum-pa, Hum-pa

We haven't a camelty tune of our own
To help us trollop along
But every neck is a hair-trombone
(Rtt-ta-ta-ta! is a hair-trombone)
And this is our marching-song:

Can't! Don't! Shan't! Won't!
Pass it along the line!
Somebody's pack has slid from his back,
Wish it were only mine.

RUDYARD KIPLING,
The Jungle Book

Conventional Grief

Arabs of means rode none but she-camels, since they went smoother under the saddle than males, and were better tempered and less noisy: whereas the coarser males grew angry, flung themselves down when tired, and from sheer rage would die there unnecessarily.

Grumbling . . . was a constant recourse of ill-treated camels. From calfhood they were accustomed to live in droves, and some grew too conventional to march alone: while none would leave their habitual party without loud grief and unwillingness.

T. E. LAWRENCE, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

Paddywack

Across the sands of Syria,
Or, possibly, Algeria,
Or some benighted neighbourhood of barrenness and drouth,
There came the prophet Sam-u-el
Upon the only Cam-u-el
A bumpy, grumpy Quadruped of discontented mouth.

The atmosphere was glutinous;
The Cam-u-el was mutinous;
He dumped the pack from off his back; with horrid grunts and squeals
He made the desert hideous;
With strategy perfidious
He tied his neck in curlicues, he kicked his paddy heels.

ARTHUR GUITERMAN,
The Legend of the First Cam-u-el

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A LEG FULL OF RUBIES

The August night
was gentle as a bucket of new milk

BY JOAN AIKEN

NIGHT, now. And a young man, Theseus O'Brien, coming down the main street of Killinch with an owl seated upon his shoulder—perhaps the strangest sight that small town ever witnessed.

The high moors brooded around the town, all up the wide street came the sighing of the river, and the August night was as gentle and full as a bucket of new milk.

Theseus turned into Tom Mahone's snug, where the men of the town were gathered peaceably together, breathing smoke and drinking mountain dew. Wild, he seemed, coming into the lamplit circle, with a look of the night on him, and a smell of loneliness about him, and his eyes had an inward glimmer from gazing into the dark. The owl on his shoulder sat quiet as a coffee-pot.

" Well, now, God be good to ye," said Tom Mahone. " What can we do for ye at all? "

And he poured a strong drop, to warm the four bones of him.

" Is there a veterinary surgeon in this town? " Theseus inquired. Then they saw that the owl had a hurt wing, the ruffled feathers all at odds with one another. " Is there a man in this town can mend him? " he said.

" Ah, sure Dr. Kilvaney's the man for ye," said they all.

" No less than a magician with the sick beasts, he is."

" And can throw a boulder farther than any man in the land."

" 'Tis the same one has a wooden leg stuffed full of rubies."

" And keeps a phœnix in a cage."

" And has all the minutes of his life numbered to the final grain of sand—ah, he's the man to aid ye."

And all the while the owl staring at them from great, round eyes.

No more than a step it was to the doctor's surgery, with half Tom Mahone's customers pointing the way. The doctor, sitting

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late to his supper by a small black fire, heard the knock and opened the door, candle in hand.

"Hoo?" said the owl at sight of him. "Who, whoo?"

And *who* indeed may this strange man be, thought Theseus, following him down the stone passageway, with his long white hair and his burning eyes of grief?

Not a word was said between them till the owl's wing was set, and then the doctor, seeing O'Brien was weary, made him sit and drink a glass of wine.

"Sit," said he, "there's words to be spoken between us. How long has the owl belonged to you?"

"To me?" said Theseus. "He's no owl of mine. I found him up on the high moor. Can you mend him?"

"He'll be well in three days," said Kilvaney. "I see you are a man after my heart, with a love of wild creatures. Are you not a doctor, too?"

"I am," answered Theseus. "Or I was," he added sadly, "until the troubles of my patients became too great a grief for me to bear, and I took to walking the roads to rid me of it."

"Come into my surgery," said the doctor, "for I've things to show you. You're the man I've been looking for."

They passed through the kitchen, where a girl was washing the dishes. Lake-blue eyes, she had, and black hair; she was small and fierce and beautiful like a falcon.

"My daughter," the doctor said absently. "Go to bed, Maggie."

"When the birds are fed, not before," she snapped.

Cage after cage of birds, Theseus saw, all down one wall of the room, finches and thrushes, starlings and blackbirds, with a sleepy stirring and twittering coming from them.

In the surgery there was only one cage, but that one big enough to house a man. And inside it was such a bird as Theseus had never seen before—every feather on it pure gold, and eyes like candle-flames.

"My phœnix," the doctor said, "but don't go too near him, for he's vicious."

The phœnix sidled near the end of the cage, with his eyes full of malice and his wicked beak sideways, ready to strike.

Theseus stepped away from the cage and saw, at the other end of the room, a mighty hour-glass that held in its twin globes enough sand to boil all the eggs in Leghorn. But most of the sand had run through, and only a thin stream remained, silting down so swiftly on the pyramid below that every minute Theseus expected to see the last grain whirl through and vanish.

"You are only just in time," Dr. Kilvaney said. "My hour has

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come. I hereby appoint you my heir and successor. To you I bequeath my birds. Feed them well, treat them kindly, and they will sing to you. But never, never let the phœnix out of his cage, for his nature is evil."

"No, no, Doctor Kilvaney!" Theseus cried. "You are in the wrong of it! You are putting a terrible thing on me. I don't want your birds, not a feather of them. I can't abide creatures in cages!"

"You must have them," said the doctor coldly. "Who else can I trust? And to you I leave also my wooden leg full of rubies —look, I will show you how it unscrews."

"No!" cried Theseus. "I don't want to see!" He shut his eyes, but he heard a creaking, like a wooden pump-handle.

"And I will give you, too," said the doctor presently, "this hour-glass. See, my last grain of sand has run through. Now it will be *your* turn."

Calmly he reversed the hour-glass, and started the sand once more on its silent, hurrying journey. Then he said, "Surgery hours are on the board outside. The medicines are in the cupboard yonder. Bridget Hanlon is the midwife. My daughter feeds the birds and attends to the cooking. You can sleep tonight on the bed in here. Never let the phœnix out of its cage. You must promise that."

"I promise," said Theseus, like a dazed man.

"Now I will say good-bye to you." The doctor took out his false teeth, put them on the table, glanced round the room to see that nothing was overlooked, and then went up the stairs as if he was late for an appointment.

All night Theseus, uneasy on the surgery couch, could hear the whisper of the sand running, and the phœnix rustling, and the whet of its beak on the bars; with the first light he could see its mad eye glaring at him.

In the morning Dr. Kilvaney was dead.

It was a grand funeral. All the town gathered to pay him respect, for he had dosed and drenched and bandaged them all, and brought most of them into the world, too.

"'Tis a sad loss," said Tom Mahone, "and he with the grandest collection of cage-birds this side of Dublin city. 'Twas in a happy hour for us the young doctor turned up to take his place."

But there was no happiness in the heart of Theseus O'Brien. Like a wild thing caged himself, he felt, among the rustling birds, and with the hating eye of the phœnix fixing him from its corner, and, worst of all, the steady fall of sand from the hour-glass to drive him half mad with its whispering threat.

And to add to his troubles, no sooner were they home from the

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funeral than Maggie packed up her clothes in a carpet-bag and moved to the other end of the town to live with her Aunt Rose, who owned the hay and feed store.

" It wouldn't be decent," said she, " to keep house for you, and you a single man." And the more Theseus pleaded, the firmer and fiercer she grew.

" Besides," she said, " I wouldn't live another day among all those poor birds behind bars. I can't stand the sight nor sound of them."

" I'll let them go, Maggie! I'll let every one of them go."

But then he remembered, with a falling heart, the doctor's last command.

" That is, all except the phœnix."

Maggie turned away. All down the village street he watched her small, proud back, until she crossed the bridge and was out of sight. And it seemed as if his heart went with her.

The very next day he let loose all the doctor's birds—the finches and thrushes, the starlings and blackbirds, the woodpecker, and the wild falcon. He thought Maggie looked at him with a kinder eye when he walked up to the hay and feed store to tell her what he had done.

The people of the town soon grew fond of their new doctor, but they lamented his sad and downcast look. " What ails him at all? " they asked one another.

And Tom Mahone said, " He's as mournful as old Doctor Kilvaney was before him. Sure, there's something insalubrious about carrying on the profession of medicine in this town."

But, indeed, it was not his calling that troubled the poor young man, for here his patients were as carefree a set of citizens as he could wish. It was the ceaseless running of the sand.

Although there was a whole roomful of sand to run through the glass, he couldn't stop thinking of the day when that roomful would be dwindled to a mere basketful, and then to nothing but a bowlful. And the thought dwelt on his mind like a blight, since it is not wholesome for a man to be advised when his latter end will come, no matter what the burial service may say.

Not only the sand haunted him, but also the phœnix, with its unrelenting stare of hate. No matter what delicacies he brought it, in the way of birdseed and kibbled corn, dry mash, and the very best granite grit—for his visits to the hay and feed store were the high spots of his days—the phœnix was always waiting with its razor-sharp beak ready to lay him open to the bone should he venture too near. None of the food would it more than nibble at.

And a thing he began to notice, as the days went past, was that

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its savage, brooding eye was always focused on one part of his anatomy—on his left leg.

It sometimes seemed to him as if the bird had a particular stake or claim to that leg, and meant to keep watch and see that its property was maintained in good condition.

One night Theseus had need of a splint for a patient. He reached up to a high shelf where he kept the mastoid mallets, and the crutches, and surgical chisels. He was standing on a chair to do it, and suddenly his foot slipped and he fell, bringing down with him a mighty bone-saw that came to the ground beside him with a clang and a twang, missing his left kneecap by something less than a feather's breadth. Pale and shaken, he got up and, turning, saw the phœnix watching him as usual, but with such an intent and disappointed look!

A cold fit of shivering came over Theseus, and he went hurriedly out of the room.

Next day when he was returning home over the bridge, carrying a bag of bird-mash, with dried milk and antibiotics added, and his mind full of the blue eyes and black hair of Maggie, a runaway tractor hurtled past him and crashed into the parapet, only one centimetre beyond his left foot.

And again Theseus shuddered, and walked home white and silent, with the cold thought on him. He found the phœnix hunched on its perch, feathers up and head sunk.

"Ah, Phœnix, Phœnix," he cried to it, "why will you be persecuting me so? Do you want to destroy me entirely?" The phœnix made no reply, but stared balefully at his left leg. Then Theseus remembered the old doctor's wooden leg full of rubies. "But I'll not wear it," he cried to the bird, "not if it was stuffed with rubies and diamonds too!"

Just the same, in his heart he believed that the phœnix would not rest satisfied while he had the use of both his legs. He took to walking softly like a cat, looking this way and that for all possible hazards, watching for falling tiles, and boiling saucepans, and galloping cattle; and the people of the town began to shake their heads over him.

His only happy hours were with Maggie, when he could persuade her to leave the store and come out walking with him. Far out of the town they'd go, forgetting the troubles that lay at home. For Maggie had found her aunt was a small, mean-minded woman who put sand in with the hens' meal and shingle among the maize, and Maggie couldn't abide such dealings.

"As soon as I've a little saved," said she, "I'll be away from this town, and off into the world."

"Maggie!" cried Theseus, and it was the first time he'd

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plucked up courage to do so. "Marry me, and I'll make you happier than any girl in the length and breadth of this land."

"I can't marry you," she said. "I could never, never marry a man who kept a phœnix in a cage."

"We'll give it away," he said, "give it away and forget about it." But as he spoke, he knew they could not. They kissed despairingly, up on the moors in the twilight, and turned homewards.

"I always knew that phœnix was a trouble-bringer," said Maggie, "from the day when Father bought it off a travelling tinker to add to his collection. He said at the time it was a bargain, for the tinker threw in the wooden leg and the great hour-glass as well, but ever after that day Father was a changed man."

"What did he give for it?" Theseus asked.

"His peace of mind. That was all the tinker asked, but it was a deal too much, I'm thinking, for that hateful bird with his wicked look and his revengeful ways."

When he had seen Maggie home, Theseus went to the Public Library, for he couldn't abide the thought of the doctor's house, dark and cold and silent, with only the noise of the phœnix shifting on its perch.

He took down the volume of the encyclopædia, OWL to POL, and sat studying it until closing-time.

Next day he was along to see Maggie.

"Sweetheart," he said, and his eyes were alive with hope, "I believe I've found the answer. Let me have a half-hundredweight sack of layers' pellets."

"Fourteen shillings," snapped Aunt Rose, who happened to be in the shop just then. Her hair was pinned up in a skinny bun, and her little green eyes were like bradawls.

"Discount for cash payment," snapped back Theseus, and he planked down thirteen shillings and ninepence, kissed Maggie, picked up the sack, and hurried away home.

Just as he got there, a flying slate from the church roof struck him; if he'd not been wearing heavy boots it would have sliced his foot off. He ran indoors and shook his fist at the phœnix.

"There!" he yelled at it, pouring a trough full of layers' pellets. "Now get that in your gizzard, you misbegotten fowl!"

The phœnix cocked its head. Then it pecked a pellet, neck feathers puffed in scorn, and one satiric eye fixed all the while on Theseus, who stood eagerly watching. Then it pecked another pellet, hanging by one claw from its perch.

Then it came down on to the floor entirely, and bowed its golden head over the trough.

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Theseus tiptoed out of the room. He went outside and chopped up a few sticks of kindling—not many, but just a handful of nice dry, thin twigs. He came back indoors—the phœnix had its head down, gobbling—and laid the sticks alongside the cage, not too close, an artful width away.

Next evening, surgery done, he fairly ran up to the hay and feed store. "Come with me," he said joyfully to Maggie, "come and see what it's doing."

Maggie came, her eyes blazing with curiosity. When they reached the surgery she could hear a cracking and a crackling: the phœnix was breaking up twigs into suitable lengths, and laying them side by side. Every now and then it would try them out in a heap; it had a great bundle in the bottom of its cage but it seemed dissatisfied, and soon pulled it all to pieces and began again. It had eaten the whole sackful of pellets and looked plump and sleek.

"Theseus," said Maggie, looking at it, "we must let it out. No bird can build inside a cage. It's not dignified."

"But my promise?"

"*I* never promised," said Maggie, and she stepped up to the cage door.

Theseus lifted a hand, opened his mouth in warning. But then he stopped. For the phœnix, when it saw what Maggie was at, inclined its head to her in gracious acknowledgment, and then took no further notice of her but, as soon as the door was opened, began shifting its heap of sticks out into the room. If ever a bird was busy and preoccupied and in a hurry, that phœnix was the one.

"But we can't let it build in the middle of the floor," said Theseus.

"Ah, sure, what harm?" said Maggie. "Look, the poor fowl is running short of sticks."

As soon as Theseus had gone for more she stepped over to the hour-glass, for her quick eye had noticed what he, in his excitement, had failed to see—the sand was nearly all run through. Quietly, Maggie reversed the glass and started the sand on its journey again; a thing she had often done for her father, unbeknownst, until the day when it was plain he would rather die than stay alive.

When Theseus came back, the phœnix was sitting proudly on top of a breast-high heap of sticks.

"We mustn't watch it now," said Maggie, "it wouldn't be courteous." And she led Theseus outside.

He, however, could not resist a slant-eyed glance through the window as they passed. It yielded him a flash of gold—the phœnix had laid an egg in a kidney-basin. Moreover, curling

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plumes of smoke were beginning to float out through the window.

"Good-bye, phœnix," Maggie called. But the phœnix, at the heart of a golden blaze, was much too busy to reply.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Theseus. "Now I shall never know when the last of my sand was due to run through." Maggie smiled, but made no comment, and he asked her, "Is it right, do you think, to let the house burn down?"

"What harm?" said Maggie again. "It belongs to us, doesn't it?"

"What will the people of the town do, if I'm not here to doctor them?"

"Go to Doctor Conlan of Drumanough."

"And what about your father's leg full of rubies?" he said, looking at the phœnix's roaring pyre.

"We'd never get it out now," said she. "Let it go on holding up the kitchen table till they both burn. We've better things to think of."

And, hand in hand, the happy pair of them ran out of the town, up along the road to the high moors and the world, leaving behind a leg full of rubies to glitter in the ashes, and a golden egg for anyone who was fool enough to pick it up. © Joan Aiken 1959

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MICE, MEN, and MISCELLANEOUS

With mice in the sky, living on nuts, orange-juice, and jelly, it is time we accorded them a position of respect among our miscellaneous bits of information; accordingly, nibble away at our quiz. No dice? No mice? Try page 95.

1. *Where is Mouse Tower? Why so called?*
2. *Who were the Big-Endians?*
3. *What is i. a fletcher; ii. a snotty?*
4. *Can you give the connection between these: cedilla; tilde; diaeresis; circumflex? And what are they?*
5. *Which playing card is called the Curse of Scotland?*
6. *Who were a. Haroun al Raschid;*
   b. Al Capone;
   c. Alcofribas Nasir;
   d. Sweet Alice whose hair was so brown?
7. *What is a Panhandle?*
8. *How many points to the compass?*

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TIME OF LOVE

He kissed her lips,
this time with hunger

BY CURTIS W. CASEWIT

THE MAJOR's door was open—a small victory. Rita gave herself a push and stepped across the threshold. "May I come in?"

The major nodded. He stood under the strong unshaded light bulb in his shorts and gun holster, playing the flute. His score was propped against a bottle on the dresser. She was sure he didn't miss a single note. He played calmly, thoughtfully, as he did everything—with perfect control of the instrument. The tune had a haunting quality. He might have been a shepherd calling his flock.

The room was, like hers, almost completely filled by a brass bed. There was no chair. Rita hesitated, then sat down on the edge of the bed. It creaked. The major stopped playing.

"My, my," Rita said. "An artistic warrior."

The major's narrow eyes made an inspection of her, quietly, humorously, taking in her tomato-red toreador pants, her white silk blouse, the beaded moccasins. "Would you like some wine?" he asked. "I have a Chianti."

"I would love it," she said huskily. He filled two glasses and she saw him approach with a lithe, swift assurance.

His hair was reddish, and he had thick reddish-blond eyebrows. He held a glass of wine towards her. "They will attack in two hours," he said softly. "It is their night."

"That's what my paper sent me for," Rita said. She could see that the major didn't like it. He stood against the window now, listening to the rain.

"It is only ten o'clock, Miss Cummings. You still have time to leave. Blood flows in these raids."

"I've been to Korea. Blood never bothers me."

"Of course not," he said. She was sure that his tone held mockery. It started to thunder. For a second, lightning made the hills seem white like flour sacks. He said slowly, "There is always the possibility of rape."

"Not for *this* girl." She looked at him out of her large blue

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eyes. She hadn't moved from the bed. Her legs were crossed, the tips of her moccasins close to his books. She watched him turn his back. She was puzzled. She couldn't understand why he ignored her.

He'd treated her coldly from the start. She lived over again the scene of her arrival days ago; her attempts to get his attention while he stood behind the marble desk, explaining some machine-gun repair to one of his men.

He saw her come in, of course, but he kept on talking to his N.C.O., his broad back against the wall, his big hands holding an oil can. The odour rose into her nostrils. "Do all your officers fiddle around with gun oil?"

"Those who like guns." He had wordlessly checked her press card, her interview orders from G.H.Q. There was only one room left, its walls marked by bullets, the washbasin punctured like a sieve. But the tap worked and there was a metal tub under the basin. She remembered drenching herself angrily and rubbing herself with the towel, her mind cursing, Damn that major, I won't run after him. He isn't interested . . .

But she was in his room now, precisely for that reason. And he still ignored the pointed volume of her breasts, the tight waist jutting into the large curve of her hips.

"About those raids, Major. Tell me more."

He turned from the window. "If they come tonight," he said in his slow intimate voice, "we will go over there tomorrow, and shoot like mad."

She was astonished by the lightness of his tone, as if the raids were boys' games. "Are they far—the barbed wires?"

"Fifty metres."

She said, "It was dark when I came by there. You'll show me tomorrow? The other side, I mean?"

"It's like ours," the major said. "They are fighting for food, for space."

"You don't hate them?"

"That would be immature."

"But they're killing your men!"

"We are killing theirs."

She was amazed and pleased. "No indignation?"

"One cannot be indignant about a fact—the fact of war. Besides, a calm soldier has much better aim."

Rita sipped at her wine. She asked, "Are you a stoic? A fatalist?"

He pondered about this. "I do not give myself much thought." He stood in profile, and she was fascinated by the alertness, the resolution in his features. With his forehead, aquiline nose,

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and jutting cheekbones, he might have stepped out of a military poster. The right age, too. Thirty-five at the most. She asked him, and her guess proved correct.

"Let me offer you some halvas," said the major. He fetched a tin from the dresser, casually closing the door. He cut a slice of the candy and handed it to her—a moist sweet morsel, melting on her tongue. She was on her stomach now, head looking over the rim of the bed. She picked up the glass of wine from the stone floor and drank. "Makes me feel good all over."

The major sat down beside her. She could feel his hand in her smooth hair, then on her ear-lobes. "What are you doing?"

He put her copper earrings on the table. "No need," he said, "to lose these."

She laughed but his lips were suddenly on hers. His chin tickled her neck; this made her laugh even more. His interest gave her a sense of triumph. He was beginning to play the game, and as usual she felt a mixture of attraction and antagonism. He was stretched out beside her now, arms cradling her head. He no longer spoke and there was no sound except the guard's footsteps in front of the hotel. She tried to think of her report, how to describe the suspense of awaiting a raid, the mines surrounding the building, the radio sputtering code, more guards scanning the hills from a watch-tower. But the major had pulled her close to him. Face to face, she could see his eyes.

"Do my boots hurt you?" he asked. "I wish I could take them off."

"Just leave them on!"

"And my gun?"

"That, too."

He said slowly, "You are a complicated girl."

She didn't answer. For a long time she didn't stir, looking towards the palm outside her window. The rain had ceased, and the leaves were heavy with moisture, gleaming like wet swords.

She said, "I shouldn't be here."

The major drew her down again. "Of course you should not." He kissed her lips, this time with hunger. She began to struggle, but her shoulders were already bare.

She said, "You have no right." But she knew she had herself to blame.

You had no business in this requisitioned hotel, she thought, no cause to enter his room, dressed up like a hussy, and lie on his bed. But she'd done these things. She had to flash her glamour at men, to tease them until they craved her. It was a game up to then. At that point she would cruelly drop them.

"Please," she said. "Let me go!" But her voice was

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unsure; she liked this man. She wrenched partially loose.

"I'm going to my room."

"You will not be able to sleep."

"I will. It's the truth."

But he held her again in the curve of his arms. He gently, firmly drew her towards his chest, toward the hard flatness and warmth of him. "Tomorrow," he said, "we may all be in a coffin."

"You don't mean that. You're deceiving yourself. Because you want me."

He didn't react, and she knew she'd been right: he wasn't the sort of man to fear death. "Please," she said. "Before it's too late." Too late for him, she thought. Not for her, because she only felt a tautness, a hostility now.

He didn't seem to mind her stiffness; his hand was patiently stroking the nape of her neck and running down her spine. She knew that his blood had mounted. It moved her, but she felt a flash of terror that she might not be able to satisfy him. "Please. Let me go. Or shall I scream?"

"Nobody would care," he said. "They would merely believe you passionate."

She began to fight. But the major was broad-shouldered and heavy-muscled. She'd become his prisoner. She said, "I hate men."

"But you need them. You came to my room to make love."

"I didn't!" But of course I did, she thought. Love up to a point. She began to button her blouse.

"Let me help you remove it," the major said softly.

"No."

"We can then lie beside each other. Without touching."

"No."

"Touching then."

His words stunned her. He'd been so restrained at first, so mockingly distant. She saw him stand in the hotel lobby again, bent over the machine-gun, thumb tucked under the muzzle. She knew more about him now, and she could see that his eyes had conveyed, You're a nuisance. We have military problems.

She managed to push back his hands. But she could not get past him. He was on the outside of the bed; the rest were all walls. She sat up against the stucco, arms circling her knees, legs pressed together. "Please let me go."

"Glad to," he said.

To Rita's surprise he rose, striding gracefully across the room. "A little more wine? Before you leave?"

She was out of danger now. She couldn't refuse. Standing

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up, her poise returned. Under the unshaded light bulb, she studied the major's face. It held no anger, no reproach. Not even disappointment. Only a faintly puzzled expression about the eyes, as though she was a gun he couldn't take apart. She said, " You're different."

" Different? "

" On the ship another journalist knocked my head against the porthole. And a fellow in Istanbul hit me. I had bruises for three days."

" The male vanity is readily injured." The major took a sip with precision. " But you have beauty, Rita. So there are always new men."

She nodded, thinking of the others: this endless seduction of men she'd only let down.

A shot cut into her thoughts. Then another shot, far away.

The major pricked up his ears. " They are raiding the captain's quarters tonight," he said. " It looks as if we may be left alone . . ." He paused to listen. " I can hear the captain answering, now," the major said. " How he hates this business! "

" And you? "

" I am used to it: I have been a professional soldier for ten years. More wine? "

She took the refill. When he put back the bottle he switched off the light. " Do you like the darkness, Rita? "

She dashed to the door. But he was there, arms ready for her. Again he was stroking her temples, the sides of her neck.

" Please don't," she said.

She grew tense as he continued to seek her skin. She struggled harder. For half an hour she had respected him, but now she hated him like all the others.

At last she said, " I've never—"

His hands stopped. " But you are twenty-seven," the major said. He released her. " What a pity, Rita."

She felt a sense of guilt now. She longed to do something for him in this dark, faraway room.

" I am not an animal." His hands suddenly left hers.

The silence made her confess, " It's always been like this. All my life."

He breathed evenly now. " Perhaps you should get married."

" Wouldn't change me." Rita's head pressed lightly against the major's shoulder.

" Talk, Rita. Not about the past, not about what has hurt you. Talk about what you believe—what you think."

She was amazed by his sensitivity. It was the first time a man had ever tried to understand her; the others had always

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repaid her with cruelty or with indifference. Rita could feel the pain rise in her, but she started to speak. Gradually the hate and fear evaporated. An explosion rang in her ears, but she talked on until there was another fracas outside the building.

"What was that?"

"Our mine, Rita. Do not be afraid." The door burst open. Someone shouted, "They are coming." The major was on his feet.

Doors flew open and his men came rushing through like a ballet troupe. The major drew his revolver. "Stay on the bed. Don't be afraid." Almost playfully he bounded into the corridor, the empty holster slapping his side. Then she heard his voice from the lobby—a different voice, brief, bold, guttural—and the hiss of bullets, the crash of glass.

The machine-gun burst into a staccato.

Rita's heart throbbed in her throat. She paced the cramped room, thinking, I can't stay cooped up like this. I must be near him. Someone groaned—was it the major?

All her self-love vanished; she was thinking only of the man.

She found herself groping along the corridor. The light bulbs were shattered, but in the lobby, explosions showed her two of the major's men glued to the wall, gun snouts aiming through the windows. She took another step forward, thinking, he told me to stay put. She obeyed, suddenly aware of the change within her.

She closed the door behind her, the reek of gunpowder still in her nostrils. She imagined the major behind the marble desk, discharging his gun, teeth bared as though playing his flute. Thank God, she thought, he isn't alone out there. He has brave men, and the machine-gun.

Its din ceased now, and she could only hear the hammering of small arms. Again, a mad fear—were the raiders getting to him? "Come back," she wanted to call. "Come back to me."

A crash made her spin round. A rifle barrel had knocked out the window. From the palm, a dark burnous swung into the room, darting towards her white blouse. She screamed. A hand seized her, clapping the taste of salt over her mouth. Wet nails tore at her blouse, ripping it off. A finger dug into her breasts, her belly.

She screamed again, and a rifle butt whacked across her shoulders. She started crawling—away from the filthy burnous, away from the stench of lice.

The door opened. The major's voice shouted, "Get down, Rita!"

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She flattened herself against the stone floor, shivering, eyes shut tight, lids dazzled by the reds and blues of the fire, eardrums ringing with blasts. Then silence, except for the raider's feet, a thud as they hit the ground under the window, and the men panting in pursuit.

When she looked next, the marauder was gone. The air was cold on her wet skin. She trembled.

"Rita!" A whisper.

She ran to the bed, her shoulder in pain. It didn't matter. He was safe; she, alive—thanks to him. Half naked, she felt the wells spring up within her. She went limp. She was ready now. She could give herself to him.

She waited to be held, to receive him. The major didn't move. She began to caress him, her lips tasting the plaster on his lips, below his eyes, on his cheekbones. In the stillness of the room she called out endearments, crazy words of love, but he didn't answer. Her hands clasped his chest, finally touching the deep, warm gash between his ribs, and the crusted blood round the wound.

Rita gripped his wrist and cried out with terror. She realised that he was dead. But she had to cling to him, hollow with tenderness, bent by desire, at last surrendering to the heralds of the flesh.

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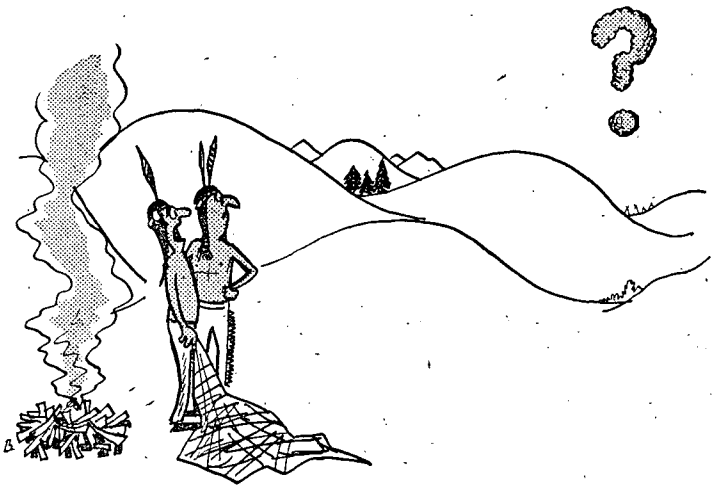

"Let's try again. They don't seem to have understood."

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PARK PIECE

I do love that country girl that
I took in the park . . .

Love's Labour's Lost

Mad, Passionate Love

Dans le vieux parc solitaire et glacé,
Deux formes ont tout à l'heure passé . . .
Tels ils marchaient dans les avenue folles,
Et la nuit seule entendit leurs paroles.

PAUL VERLAINE, *Colloque Sentimental*

Bad Blood in the Bois

On an ill-fated Tuesday the Marquis was exercising the filly in one of the broad alleys of the Bois. He was in an especially amiable mood and in the most stylish possible costume—altogether quite a modern Apollo. Rush—whiz—flash, and out of a narrow path that made so short a turn that nobody but a maniac or an Englishwoman would have ridden fast around it, darted Lady Arabella Graham on the back of her fiend of an Irish mare. She saw nothing, and she could not have checked the mare if she had seen. Like a cannon-ball, the Hibernian fury dashed against the filly, knocked her down, and added a vicious kick. When the Marquis could realize anything, he found himself lying on the ground, with his shoulder-blade broken . . .

Only Spitfire's strength and her mistress's quickness prevented her also having an ugly tumble. On they dashed, like a female impersonation of the Centaur; but, as soon as she could, Lady

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Arabella reined in the mare, and turned her, prancing and rearing, with all her impish tricks fully roused, back to the spot where the accident occurred.

The Marquis was trying to raise himself from the earth. His eyes met the lady's; each recognized an implacable foe . . .

ANON, *Lady Arabella, from Argosy, October* 1874

A Stroll at Knole

As I lie warming in the evening sun
I feel my grassbound side grow damp and see
The golden couples strolling in the park.

As I lie gold my twilight has begun
The grass uncurls its claws and owl in tree
Mocks at the couples plunging into dark.

As I lie mocked in darkness and undone
By greedy grass, the stars fly one two three—
Each has a loving couple as his mark.

S. OAKS, *Knole Park*

No Parking!

The Bois de Boulogne will never be quite the same again. Under the new set of by-laws just issued in Paris, a whole network of restrictions has been imposed on Paris parks. People who are not allowed in include: "Persons who are drunk or dirty, beggars, musicians, singers and any persons carrying a burden likely to inconvenience others. Sports attire is tolerated only for persons engaged in exercises." It is also forbidden to beat carpets, clean cars, light fires, use catapults or sing in chorus without special permission of the Prefect of Police.

PENDENNIS, *in The Observer*

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Danger of Mischief

Oh sir, what an adventure have I to write!—Yesterday it was settled that we should spend the evening in Marybone-Gardens, where Mr. Torre, a celebrated foreigner, was to exhibit some fireworks. The firework was really beautiful, but there was such an explosion of fire, and so horrible a noise, that we all, as of one accord, jumped hastily from the form, and ran away some paces, fearing that we were in danger of mischief, from the innumerable sparks of fire which glittered in the air.

Every moment I was spoken to by some bold and unfeeling man, to whom my distress only furnished a pretence for impertinent witticisms.

At last, a young officer, marching fiercely up to me, said, "You are a sweet pretty creature, and I enlist you in my service."

FANNY BURNEY, *Evelina*

Age of Consent

Astounding the bucolic grass,
The bandsmen sweat in golds and reds
And put their zeal into the brass.
A glorious flustered major heads

Their sort of stationary charge.
Their lips are pursed, their cheeks get pink;
The instruments are very large
Through which they render Humperdinck.

The sailors and the parlourmaids
Both vote the music jolly good,
But do not worry if it fades
As they stroll deeper in the wood.

JAMES MICHIE,
from
Park Concert

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THE YELLOW CRAB

Trying to pick a murderer
is no way to recuperate

BY H. E. BATES

MR. PICKERING watched the crab emerge with sinister caution from its hole in the sand for the fourth time in fifteen minutes. It was quite unlike any crab he had ever seen.

The first time it had almost frightened him. He had not been prepared for the strange black periscope eyes that suddenly lifted themselves up on a pair of inquisitive feelers above the little yellow spider body. At one moment the hot white sand was deserted. The next the crab was there, fifteen inches away from his hand, watching him exactly as if it had trundled up at that precise spot to keep an engagement with him on the shore of the little bay.

"Did you see the sun rise?" Mrs. Pickering said.

And he said, "Yes, over there," pointing due north-westward at the same moment as he whispered.

"It was marvellous, quite marvellous," Mrs. Pickering said, "all orange and rose," and in a moment the crab, marching backwards swifter than any spider, was gone again in the sand.

"Now you've frightened him away," he said.

"Frightened who?"

"He's never been really right out yet," Mr. Pickering said. "He comes so far and then he sees me. I always wondered what the little holes in the sand were and now I know. He's got eyes like shoe-buttons on the top of sticks."

"Who are you talking about—?"

"Not so loud!" Mr. Pickering said. "I want him to come out again."

While he waited for another six or seven minutes, lying sideways on his face, watching the hole where the crab lay, Mrs. Pickering made herself more comfortable in a shallow burrow in the sand. She stretched there plumply in a white silk bathing dress, her heavy legs and chest and shoulders a raw carmine-red from the heat of sun and Pacific winds. Mr. Pickering was much leaner, almost scraggy, and his taut skin had a neutral leathery sallowness that would not tan.

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" You ought to have your swim now if you're going to," Mrs. Pickering said.

He said, " Damn," in a whisper not loud enough for Mrs. Pickering to hear. He had been perfectly sure the crab was coming up again at that moment. He felt sure he had caught the first glimpse of its sinister seedy eyes. Now it would be another five minutes, at least, before it made another try.

" I think we should get an early lunch and then take the car and do a drive along the coast," Mrs. Pickering said.

She was sitting upright now, fatly squabbed, rubber-fleshed, brushing white-pink crystals of sand from her arms and calves and shoulders.

" I wish you wouldn't chatter," he said. " I want the crab to come out."

" Oh, it's a crab," she said. " Why didn't you say so? I've seen hundreds of them."

" Not like this one."

" Is it yellow like a spider with sort of knitting needles on its head and it looks at you? "

When Mr. Pickering began to say that it was and how did she know, Mrs. Pickering idly flicked shining particles of sand from her body, gazing at the parallel bars of blue and white made across the sea by the steady motion of trade winds beyond the sheltered basin of the bay.

" I sat here all the afternoon yesterday looking at them while you were over at the island. Rock Island or wherever it was. They come out when it's quiet. What were you doing there? "

Mr. Pickering, too, sat up. " I've got something to show you," he said.

He put his hand into the pocket of his cream gaberdine trousers and threw over to Mrs. Pickering something which fell without a sound into the powdery sand.

" Well, for heaven's sake, what is it? " she said.

" I bet you never saw one of those before."

" Well, what is it? "

" Look at it," Mr. Pickering said. " Take a good look at it. I bet you never saw one before."

Mrs. Pickering gave a surprised fleshy laugh and said, " Well, my goodness, it's some sort of dollar coin. Five! " she said. " Five dollars."

" Gold," Mr. Pickering said. " American."

" But they don't have gold—"

" And take a look at that," Mr. Pickering said. " Guess what that is." He threw over to Mrs. Pickering once again something which fell into dazzling soft sand without a sound.

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"This isn't a dollar," she said. "This has got an animal or something on it. Sort of crocodile."

"Dragon," Mr. Pickering said. "St. George killing the dragon."

"You mean to say this is English?"

"English sovereign," he said. "Gold. Now it's worth double—treble, maybe."

With careful indifference Mr. Pickering got up and began to take his trousers off. Underneath them he was wearing loose-fitting crimson swimming trunks, with a bathing belle embroidered in blue and white on the left leg.

Mr. Pickering folded the trousers neatly and then carefully walked across to his wife and laid them in the broad lap made by her pink-skinned thighs.

"Look in the pocket," he said. "Go on. Take a look in the pocket."

Across the sand, beyond a line of hurricane-twisted palms, in front of the blue-walled hotel, a coloured boy in a white jacket was serving rum-punches to a group of sunbathers lying under a vast orange umbrella. The sun flashed on the amber glasses, the tray, and the silver tongs of the ice-container as the boy lifted them.

Mr. Pickering pretended to watch all this with an absorbed but casual interest. In reality he was watching his wife slowly take from the pocket of his trousers seven dollar pieces and thirteen sovereigns.

"Now you know why I came down to the beach with my trousers on," he said. "I didn't know where the heck to leave the things. I got a funny feeling about them—felt they were sort of contraband."

"You didn't—?"

"Oh no," he said. "They're legitimate enough, only you don't see 'em any more."

"Then where on earth did you get them?"

"Bought 'em," he said.

"But where?"

"Over at the island. Yesterday."

He smiled a leathertight, pursing sort of smile that brought his lips together in a thin and parsimonious line. "And if I have any luck I'll buy some more today. Maybe a hundred. Maybe two."

"You must be crazy," she said. "All your life you've been making money. Now you start buying it. That's crazy."

Mr. Pickering sat down in the sand to unlace his crimson crêpe-soled deck shoes. In one of them was a spoonful of

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white sand and he slowly and thoughtfully poured it away like salt.

"You know the house along the road?" he said. "The white one with the blue roof? The one you like so much? With the red bougainvillaea on the walls?"

"I like that house—yes."

"What if we buy it? Not now, but in a couple or three weeks. Before we go home?"

"But you know what they're asking for that house? They're asking—"

"I know what they're asking."

"Well, you know we could never find that kind of money. Where would we find that much money?"

"We don't have to find it," Mr. Pickering said. "It's here."

Mr. Pickering looked over his shoulder in time to see the coloured boy in the white jacket walking towards them with drinks on a tray.

"Wait till the boy's gone," he said. "Well, there you are! How's the rum-swizzle trade?" The coloured boy smiled and bent down and Mr. Pickering took two red-golden punches from the tray. "One of the things I like about this hotel is this free drink they give you in the mornings."

"You pay for it," Mrs. Pickering said. "You pay in the end."

"I tell you what," he said. "I've forgotten my water-goggles. Boy, would you send somebody down with my water-goggles and my flippers—Room 17. Quick as you can, please."

"Yessir."

When the boy had gone, Mr. Pickering sat sucking rum through a straw and watching the long, almost phosphorescent lines of breakers spuming on the inner reefs of the bay. They were very beautiful in their pure curling regularity, like waves of bright-brushed hair. Beyond them the sea had the blueness of vitriol, with stripes of acid green fading to sandy yellow where the shallows were. Beyond that the thin low rocks of an island seemed like nothing more than a blue-brown floating board except when spray hit them, and leapt like a wild white horse into clear ocean beyond.

"It's all over there," Mr. Pickering said.

"On the island? How did you find that out?"

Mr. Pickering sucked once more at the straws of his glass and then looked about him to see if anyone was coming. The boy had not come back.

"You've heard of Maxted," he said.

"But that was a long time ago. That's closed, isn't it? Everybody's forgotten about that."

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"When a man's murdered nobody forgets about it. Especially the person who did the murder."

Mrs. Pickering played with sand, letting it run like iridescent mist through her podgy fingers, and said that she didn't see what the murder of the man named Maxted had to do with gold on Rock Island.

"Or for that matter with you."

"The man had an empire," he said. "A bit here, a bit there. A fortune here, one over there—nobody knows how much he had. This is only one bit of it."

"You're going to try to tell me he left odd fortunes lying around in gold pieces," she said, "just for the picking up."

"You might call it funk money," he said. "You might call it insurance. Some would. Dictators do it—a cache here and a cache there. You know—against the evil day."

"The boy's coming with your goggles," she said. "You know, I think I'll go to the hotel. I find it very nearly too hot to sit in the sun."

"Just wait two minutes. While the boy's gone. Then I'll have my swim."

The boy brought Mr. Pickering's goggles, a pair of rubber, frogmen flippers, and a telephone message on a tray.

"That's all right," Mr. Pickering said. He reached for his trousers and gave the boy two English shillings. "That's fine. Thank you."

The boy went away and Mrs. Pickering said, "Who is that from?"

"Man named Torgsen," he said. "You know the funny little pink house near the harbour? Has shells and sea-fans and goddam porcupine fish hanging up outside? He keeps that. He's got a motor boat—he's going to take me across to the island."

"This afternoon?"

"Two o'clock," he said. "He's the one who knows all about it."

"If he knows all about it why doesn't he keep it to himself? What's he have to let you in on it for?"

"Now you've hit it," Mr. Pickering said.

He was fitting on his flippers. When both of them were fixed, his feet had the appearance of those of a giant green duck.

"They're all scared to hell," he said. "Everybody knows just enough to scare everybody else."

"About the murder or about the money?"

"Both," Mr. Pickering said. "When war broke out Maxted salted away about a quarter of a million in gold coinage on the island. The island belonged to him anyway, and he had three

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motor boats keeping trespassers away. That's what I mean about funk money."

Mrs. Pickering understood about the funk money but not about Torgsen.

"Why should that old junk-store shell-collector know anything?" she said. "He looks like a soaker to me."

"He's a remarkable man," Mr. Pickering said. "Maxted made a pal of him. He liked catching out-of-the-way fish and getting Torgsen to set them up. You soak them in formaldehyde and then they harden up in the sun. Maxted had a big collection, all done by Torgsen."

Thoughtfully Mr. Pickering began to polish the eyepieces of his goggles.

"If the money was so hush-hush, I don't see how Torgsen got to know about it anyway," Mrs. Pickering said.

"Maxted began to pay him in gold," Mr. Pickering said. "That's how."

"I don't see how that makes sense."

"Oh yes," he said. "That makes sense. That was the vanity part. It wasn't only that Maxted liked empires. He liked behaving like an emperor. Sometimes he'd go in to see Torgsen, and if a fish wasn't ready he'd knock Torgsen down. One day he pressed his thumbs under his eyes until his eyeballs stuck out."

Mrs. Pickering began to say that she did not wonder that Maxted, making so many enemies, had been murdered at last, but Mr. Pickering said, "Funny thing, he made friends that way, too. Torgsen was a friend. Every time Maxted knocked him down or shoved his eyeballs out he'd come back next day in a terrible state—remorse and all that—and beg forgiveness and say what a brute he'd been and what could he do to show how sorry he was?"

"Torgsen was the fool."

"Oh no," Mr. Pickering said. "I don't think so. Maxted would give him ten or twenty pounds as sort of compensation. Easy money. Then one day he kicked him in the belly and knocked him unconscious—and next day Maxted was in a terrible state and that was when he paid him in gold."

Mrs. Pickering in a bored way got up and put her wrap on her shoulders and thrust her feet into her pink sisal-grass beach shoes that had an embroidery of pale green and blue shells on the toes.

"It all sounds like drink to me," she said. "Anyway, I'm going up to change now. Don't be very long. You know how it is if we're not in there when the gong goes."

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"He was a drunk all right," Mr. Pickering said. "But that doesn't alter the fact that Torgsen can buy dollars and sovereigns on the island. That's a fact you can't get away from."

"I'd better take your trousers, hadn't I?" she said. "I'll put the coins in my handbag. By the way, what do you give for them?"

"They're glad to get about twenty per cent less than they're worth," he said. He laughed with brown, leathery, acquisitive lips. "Figure it out while you're dressing."

Mr. Pickering put his goggles on and flapped down to the sea like a semi-naked, balding, upright frog. For some time he swam in and among the low reefs protecting the little inner bay from the trade winds that blew beyond the headland. The water everywhere was so clear and limpid that he could see in these sea-gardens shoals of blue-and-orange fish a few inches long, and larger fish of striped pink and blue. The seaweed, rose-violet in places, chocolate in others, sometimes bright yellow, waved everywhere about him with the gentle torment of shoals of anchored eels.

When he came out of the sea and went back to his place on the beach he lay there for some time with his face upturned to the sky. The sun was very hot and there was no sound in the air except the small folding lap of minute waves eating into smooth white sand.

"Somebody knows," Mr. Pickering told himself. "Somebody must know."

In that moment he remembered the crab; and as he turned his head he saw to his surprise and delight that it had come out again to look at him, poised on its wiry yellow legs, with its queer, ghoulish, disembodied little eyes.

"Part of it's under the sea," Mr. Pickering said, "or in the sea. I found out that much."

"You know, you came here to relax," Mrs. Pickering said. "Trying to pick a murderer is no way to recuperate after pleurisy."

"I'm not trying to pick any murderer," he said. "I'm interested in picking up a fortune."

"Just the same, one links with the other," she said. "And anyway it doesn't relax you."

"I feel great," he said. "You've got to give your mind something to do anyway, haven't you? You just can't sit the whole time."

Mr. Pickering, in three weeks of Caribbean sun, watching the infinite blues of Caribbean waters, had almost forgotten the harsh

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and competitive world he had left behind him. Sometimes he took from his wallet one of the cards which Charlie Muller, his partner, and himself had fixed up after long deliberation and which both of them thought was pretty good. *We insure anything*, it said, *and sell the world.* These words and the cards on which they were printed, together with *Pickering & Muller, Brokers*, seemed no longer real when seen through the foggy distances of three weeks of time. Nor did Charlie Muller seem real; nor the high offices from which Mr. Pickering and his associate and six typists looked across towards the river and Tower Bridge.

It was surprising, Mr. Pickering thought, how a world could slip away from you; surprising, too, how another, the world of Torgsen and Maxted's murder and Maxted's gold, could so insidiously replace it and so soon.

"Well, I got a hundred pound's worth," he said.

"Let's sit here," Mrs. Pickering said, "and watch the sunset."

Mrs. Pickering's passion for watching sunsets brought them every evening, in the hour before dinner, to a small promontory on the eastern edge of the bay.

Below, on the white beach, the long line of hurricane-stricken palms, in almost horizontal curves, took on the strange appearance of gigantic burnished scimitars in the gold-rose glow of dying light. The enormous sinking sun set the calmest of seas on fire. On top of the promontory was a wooden seat above which grew trees of incense covered with small trails of parasite orchids of pinkish mauve, uncommonly like butterflies, and the air was heavy with the drenching sweetness of the incense flowers.

"Look at the sea now," Mrs. Pickering said. "Every wave has a pink tip on it. Look at it now—isn't that heavenly? In a minute it'll be orange or yellow or something—it changes so quickly."

Mr. Pickering looked at the sea and saw in its brilliant surface, four hundred yards from shore, a long dark boat, narrow like a canoe, piled high with what seemed to be a system of wrecked hen-coops.

"There go the crayfish boys," he said. "Setting their pots. That's another thing I must do—spear crayfish."

"It's all red now," Mrs. Pickering said. "Look! It's all red like fire."

"You suppose they do catch crayfish?" Mr. Pickering said. "Could be they don't—you know, it could be!" He suddenly got up from the seat, descended the small flight of steps that had been cut into the black rock of the promontory, and went down to the edge of the sea.

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Over by the thin brown reef the boat had stopped. Mr. Pickering peered across the green-red sunset waters and watched as, one after another, the hen-coop crayfish pots were pitched into the sea. He could see in the boat two brownskin boys wearing tattered grey shirts and sombre trilby hats. He could see clearly the splash of each crayfish pot whitening the delicate surface of the sea. Then the rock of the reef itself seemed to leap up from the surrounding liquid fire with such striking solidity that Mr. Pickering was suddenly overwhelmed with the brilliance of an astounding idea.

"Look—that's it, that's it," he said. "I bet you a million to one that's how Maxted hid it. Torgsen says it's under the sea—and I bet all the tea in China that's how it got there."

A double echo of his voice, strangely contrived between rock and sea, brought back to him the sudden realisation that he was speaking to himself. He ran back up the steps. Mrs. Pickering was standing in a posture of bent rapture against the low concrete wall built round the top of the little cliff. Mr. Pickering, running in rubber-soled shoes, seized her elbow so suddenly that she gave a short cry, startled.

"Oh, you scared me. You really did—I was watching the sun just disappearing—look at it, you can see it moving. Look—it's going down."

"I just figured it out," Mr. Pickering said. "It's simple, really. Obvious. Maxted liked these rare fish. He loved poking about these reefs—used to spend days at it, Torgsen says. So what does he do? He puts the stuff there—there are millions of these damn reefs and cays where you could hide stuff and nobody would ever know. Well, nobody . . . somebody knows. Torgsen knows."

"It gets dark so quickly," she said. "Look, there's only a tip of the sun now. It's just like a fingernail—just like a red fingernail. Don't you think so?"

"Ah-ah," he said. "That's beautiful. You see the crayfish boys are going back now. Funny how they always come just at the same time."

The scarlet upper tip of sun slid with arresting swiftness below the horizon, leaving the sea smouldering with wavelets of pure orange touched by strokes of eucalyptus green. The air fell suddenly so dead calm that the dip of the single stern oar of the crayfish boat made a snap in the air as it flipped at the sea.

"It won't be long now before the fire-flies are out," Mrs. Pickering said. "I love it when the fire-flies begin."

Until this exotic Caribbean visit, Mrs. Pickering had never seen fire-flies before, and her first sight of them in the hot

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sub-tropical darkness, like dancing gas-green glow-worms, had startled her almost as much as the crab had startled Mr. Pickering when he first saw it in the sand.

"And that reminds me. You know, I found out something about them," she said. "I was reading it in a magazine while you were over at the island this afternoon. Those lights they have—they're signals."

"What of?" Mr. Pickering said. "Danger?"

"No. It's like morse code—or do I mean semaphore? Each of these flashes is in a sort of code—either it's one, two, one or it's two, one, one or something like that; and it's a signal from the female to male."

"About what?"

"About love—mating and all that. The male flies round on his own wave-length or whatever you call it, one, two, one, until he finds a girlfriend on the same wave-length making his signal."

"Then they clinch, I suppose," Mr. Pickering said.

"I think it's the most beautiful thing," she said.

Mr. Pickering did not answer this time, and his wife sat with enraptured patience looking at the sea. All its colours were dissolving and softening down to one colour—at least you thought it was one colour until you looked, as she did now, with eyes of half-closed penetration, and then you saw that it was an iridescence of fifty colours, perhaps a hundred, perhaps more, each small wave with its smeared brush-stroke of tenderest coloured light.

"You know, it's funny," Mr. Pickering said. "You mention this murder and they all start talking about the price of bananas or some damn thing. Nobody wants to talk."

"I can understand that," she said. "It's ten years ago, so why not let it rest? It's over and done with. And a good thing."

"Not on your life," Mr. Pickering said. "The murderer's here on this island. And don't tell me that's a good thing. They sometimes do it again, you know that."

"All right. Have you a theory?"

"Not yet," he said. "But I probably will have after I've been over to Cat Cay tomorrow. That's just a lump of reef and sand over on the other side of Rock Island. You don't see it from here. But I'll bet my bottom dollar that's where the other part of the gold is."

"Nearly dark now. Only blue and tiny bits of yellow on the water. You can feel the wind turning, can't you?"

During the daytime the wind, the trade-wind, fresh and warm and illuminating the dark blue water with bars of snow foam, came from the sea. At night it blew from the mountains.

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"Didn't they try a man once for it and let him off?" Mrs. Pickering said.

"They did."

"Then don't you think they'd have tried someone else if the murderer is here on the island? After all, it's so little. Just a few thousand people, that's all."

"You've got it there," Mr. Pickering said. "It's little—so everybody knows everybody. Everybody knows something. Everybody knows and everybody keeps his mouth shut."

Mrs. Pickering straightened up at last from her position of enraptured patience by the concrete wall.

The sea was almost dark now, pure indigo, the sky above it a soft-washed green fading, far up, to palest night-blue. The colours of the parasite orchids could not be seen in the incense trees. The palms and the big striped aloes on the hotel terrace were simply blackened shadows.

"I think that's what you should do," Mrs. Pickering said. "Keep your mouth shut."

"I've a sort of feeling that we came here just in time," Mr. Pickering said. "A year or two back you'd never have had the chance of this stuff. Plenty of money about. They were holding on. Now money's getting tight. Plenty tight. So they're unloading. It's the ground floor."

They had begun to walk down the rocky path from the high point of the promontory towards the hotel and the shore. Sea and sky were now almost joined in one dark blue mass together, and the mountains, with their lower fringes of enormous palms, seemed to be on the point of stumbling into the sea.

"I still don't see why all these people have got these gold dollars and sovereigns to sell anyway," Mrs. Pickering said.

"You got to pay to keep mouths shut, haven't you?" he said. "See?"

"I see."

Mr. Pickering laughed in the warm darkness. A sudden turn of wind, like the enlarged echo of his voice, woke into metallic chatter the brittle fronds of the hurricane-bent palms that ran out towards the dark surface of the sea.

"Oh! Look!" Mrs. Pickering said. "The fire-flies. Making their signals."

Lying on the sand the following afternoon, Mrs. Pickering watched the crab continually emerge from its neat hole with the same sinister caution as before. Several times during the afternoon it ran out from the hole as much as ten or fifteen inches before it became aware of her and scuttled back.

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There was something horribly repulsive, she thought, about the way a crab ran backwards. Nor did she feel easy about the grotesque, upraised, periscope eyes that seemed almost to swivel in the little yellow shell. Each time they left her with the chilling impression that the crab was really a monster that time had dwarfed.

She wished all the afternoon that Mr. Pickering would come. She had something to tell Mr. Pickering.

She did not know whether it was important or whether it was one of those things women just said for the sake of saying something, but she had been talking after lunch to a Mrs. Archibald, a Vermonter.

She had always understood that Vermonters were queer birds —somebody had once told her that—and this Mrs. Archibald was the type that buttonholed you in corners and kept you there whether you liked it or not.

It was about the Maxted murder that Mrs. Archibald had spoken.

She and her husband had been on the island three years before, and on that occasion there was a young woman from Chicago or St. Paul or somewhere who was investigating the case—not officially, Mrs. Archibald said, just poking her nose in.

"And her they found wrapped up on the seashore," Mrs. Archibald said. "In a sack."

As she heard this Mrs. Pickering felt a stab of coldness drive through the centre of her spine.

She guessed it was really that same feeling, uneasy and nervous and chilling, that she re-experienced every time the crab ran backwards towards its hole.

By five o'clock she had begun to be uneasy, too, about Mr. Pickering; she was certain he ought to be back. She was uneasy also about being alone on the deserted shore.

Most people seemed to lie on their beds in the afternoon, and for nearly three hours there had been no one on the sand but herself and the crab.

Then soon after five o'clock she saw that in the quietness two herons, a young one and its mother, had come to fish along the shaken edge of sea. They were so delicate and pretty: so graceful, so unlike the crab.

The mother had a dark dove-coloured sheen on her feathers and her legs were blue. The young bird had feathers of bottle-green and its smaller body seemed cast on the water like the shadow of the larger bird.

The sight of the birds, so delicate and undisturbed, calmed

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all her feelings about Mrs. Archibald, the crab, and the young woman who had been found in a sack: so that when Mr. Pickering at last appeared she had nothing to say but, "Oh, Ed dear, look at the birds. Look at their legs—just the colour of the sea so the fish won't see them. And look at the baby one, the way it does what its mother does. Oh, I've had fun watching them."

"Sorry I'm late," Mr. Pickering said. "But wait till you hear—"

"Oh, that's all right. I've had such fun watching the birds. What did you do?"

"The darnedest thing," Mr. Pickering said.

"On Cat Cay?"

"No," he said. "Right along the coast here."

"Oh, look at the herons! Just look. The young one's trying to catch something—"

"Met a fellow named Wilson. Just a nobody. Torgsen says his mother kept a house on the waterfront—this Wilson fellow was the result of some damn Glasgow deckhand dropping in one time. Just scum."

"The young one is so pretty," Mrs. Pickering said. "What about him?"

"Incredible," Mr. Pickering said. "He's living like Crœsus. Like Rockefeller. He's got a palace along the coast here with onyx bathrooms and Louis Quatorze toilets and God knows what. He owns three sugar mills and two banana plantations and a steam yacht. Oh, and that reminds me, I knew there must be a woman in this somewhere."

"Why?"

The two herons had paraded far along the shore and now had turned and were dreamily coming back.

"Because Maxted was mad on them. He ran five or six at a time. You know what? He'd hang about the harbour until he saw some popsie on a cruise-ship that he fancied and then he'd take her home and give her a house and set her up. Not satisfied with one or two—but five or six. The big possessor."

"And is Mr. Wilson fond of the ladies, too?"

Mr. Pickering laughed.

"You're pretty smart, aren't you, Mrs. Pickering?"

"I just thought."

"Yes," he said. "Mr. Wilson is fond of the ladies. And it seems Mr. Wilson and Mr. Maxted were once fond of the same lady. A girl named Louie. In fact, the week before Maxted was murdered they all spent a weekend on Maxted's yacht. And now Louie is Mrs. Wilson."

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"That's no surprise. Did you see her?"

"No."

"And what made you go to see Mr. Wilson, anyway, instead of going to Cat Cay? Oh look, the little heron is lost. It's turned round the wrong way and can't see its mother."

"Seems he'd heard of me, that's all," Mr. Pickering said. "He's got big connections in insurance—and seems he'd even heard of us. Said he'd like to see me."

"And just you think, there are people who kill and stuff those lovely things and put them in glass cases. Oh, look at them!"

"You know what I think? And I told Torgsen so. I think Louie killed Maxted."

Along the shore the parent heron, gazing down with dreaminess at the blue-green evening sea, seemed to be waiting for its young, and Mrs. Pickering gave a quick cry of maternal delight.

"They're so intelligent, too," she said. "You see, she knows!"

"Fascinating, isn't it?" Mr. Pickering said. "Of course it might not be. But before Maxted was murdered Wilson hadn't a bean. Just a hanger-on. But Louie had—Maxted had seen to that. And now Wilson has all the beans he needs and Louie too."

Suddenly along the shore the herons were flying. Mrs. Pickering gave a cry of dismay and saw that two bathers were running down, carrying white and scarlet wraps, from the hotel to the sea.

"They've frightened them away!"

"That reminds me," Mr. Pickering said. "I meant to have my swim."

"Oh, it's too late now. Let's walk instead. You can have your swim before breakfast."

"I guess the morning's better," Mr. Pickering said. "Anyway, I need more time—I've got to practise with the new diving outfit Wilson lent me."

"Wilson lent you?"

"It's the latest thing," Mr. Pickering said. "Cost the earth and it's pretty complicated. But you can stay under for a couple of hours. You should come diving, you know; it's a beautiful world down there. The colours are out of this world—"

"I don't swim that well," she said. "By the way, what about the gold? Where does that fit in?"

The first breeze from landward, a mere breath, seemed to creep down the mountain slopes as Mr. and Mrs. Pickering turned to walk across the sand.

"It could be Louie again," Mr. Pickering said, "couldn't

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it? Louie was the favourite girl when the gold was salted down. I'll bet Louie knows where it is. And now and then, as I say, a little comes in handy for palm-oil."

"It's too fantastic."

"I guess life is, too," Mr. Pickering said, "isn't it? Those dollars and sovereigns have to come from somewhere. And it's smart for these boys to sell them when they can."

Mrs. Pickering, hardly listening, turned to see if the herons had come back to the shore, but the two delicate figures, no more than stringless kites, were sailing seaward past the edge of the promontory.

"By the way," Mr. Pickering said. "Did you see my friend the crab?"

"Yes," she said, and in the humid evening she felt once again the quick cold stab of repulsion go thinly down her spine. "He was there. The ugly thing."

Next morning when Mr. Pickering came down to the shore about six o'clock, nothing moved there except the two herons gracefully wading along the bright shallow edge of sea. They flew up at his approach and settled farther along the white sea-flattened sand as Mr. Pickering sat down to put his flippers on. On the expanse of rose-blue sea nothing moved except a small out-island fruit boat, slowly tacking with full white sail in the breathless air across the gold-pink path of rising sun.

When Mr. Pickering had fixed his flippers he once again had the appearance of a semi-naked, balding, upright frog. It took him some time to adjust the breathing apparatus, with its long curved tube and its big protuberant face mask, and to fix the oxygen bottle comfortably to his chest. He put on the mask and took it off again several times before it fitted.

"The trouble is it's so damn buoyant," Wilson had said. "You may find difficulty in stopping under. But you can get over that by carrying a weight or something. Put a basket on your back for your fish and put a rock in the bottom. That'll hold you down."

"I never keep my fish with me," Torgsen said. "Spear 'em and bring 'em up—that's what I say in these waters. I don't want no shark sniffing for me."

"This thing's different," Wilson said. "It's designed for stopping down. You can stay down a couple of hours with no bother. There's no need to keep coming up."

Just before Mr. Pickering succeeded in fixing his oxygen breathing apparatus the long curved boat of the crayfish boys drew smoothly past the end of the promontory. Mr. Pickering

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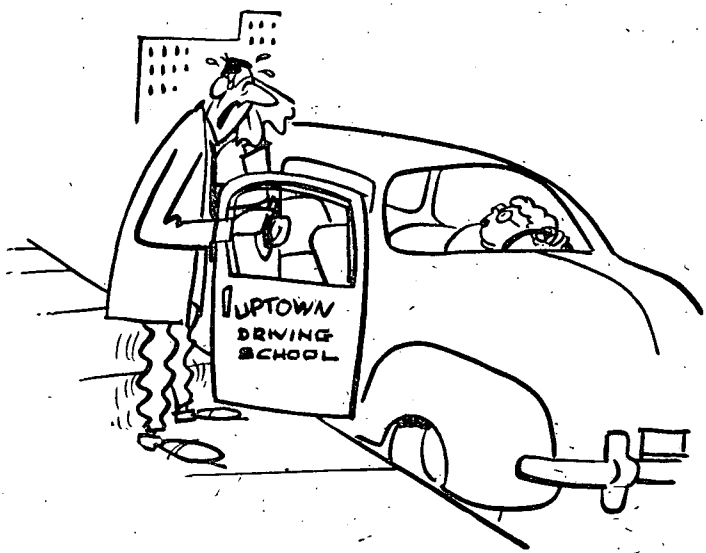
waved his hand, but the two brownskin boys, rowing quickly, were too far away to reply.

When the boat had disappeared, the sea was completely empty between the long dark reef and the curious half-frog, half-warrior figure of Mr. Pickering entering the water, with his blue water-spear upraised in his hand.

Soon, as the sun rose higher, it struck the black edge of the promontory of rock, heightening the startling yellow band of high-water mark. It flared, too, on the incense trees, lighting up the trailed butterfly ribbons of the rosy parasite orchid flowers.

After nearly two hours it spread with full harsh whiteness on the entire shore, deserted except for the two herons daintily walking in the sea, the young one so like a green shadow of the other. It burnt down on Mr. Pickering's bright-flowered abandoned dressing-wrap and on his empty crimson shoes.

And presently it fell, too, on the black eyes of the yellow crab, emerging with sinister caution from its hole in the sand—once again as if it had an appointment with Mr. Pickering that Mr. Pickering had not, for some reason, been able to keep after all.



"That completes our course of instruction, madam. You and your insurance company are now on your own."

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BUDAFUL PEST

She smiled her provocative, lopsided, triangular smile

BY GERALD KERSH

WHEN I first met Bella Barlay face to face, she having for once consented to be interviewed, I wondered what two generations of European connoisseurs could have seen in her. My sort of article was of the half-scurrilous, city-slicker, sophisticated type: the sort of thing that, under the guise of urbane reportage, does a taxidermist's job of flaying, stuffing, and mounting. We were swift with our used razor blades and black-headed pins in those days. It was fashionable, generally, to make specimens of those who spared us their time, and we could take a word out of context as neatly as a sandpiper picks a worm out of a beach at low tide.

Moth, was the word I mentally noted in connection with Bella Barlay when I saw her sitting crouched in a powdery-looking fawn housecoat upon a great brocade sofa in her suite at the Hotel Elegant in London. I even had a brilliant opening paragraph composed in my mind, the exact content of which I forget; but it would have raised many a carious half laugh in the dentists' waiting-rooms where my magazine was most widely read.

Then the moth stirred and spread itself, and here was no blundering booby that knocks its head against bright lights and makes itself conspicuous only by its nuisance value. Here was something rare and elusive.

I knew then why grand dukes had offered h[illegible]arriage, though millions of ordinary women all over the wo[illegible]d clipped her picture from the illustrated papers simply to [illegible]their friends, "I'm not vain, and I know I'm no beauty but, thank goodness, I don't look like Bella Barlay!"

Her features were undistinguished, and her face was too narrow. Her skin has been described as olive, and so it was—that of a green olive gone dry. Her eyes, which were wide-set, were black, round, and prominent, while her hair was tossed about rather than dressed. Yet when she smiled her countenance broke into a tantalisingly beautiful mosaic pattern: it made an

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abstract composition that got at your heart while your baffled intelligence grumbled admiration under protest. And when she talked, I noticed first that her voice had the quaint, husky, lingering sweetness of a cowbell heard on a misty hill . . . then there crept into it a nostalgic quality, as of something half lost and crying to come home to memory.

Seeing that I was abashed, Bella Barlay offered me a cup of tea. Her teacosy was a queer obus of straw and silk tortuously covered with wooden beads of various shapes and colours. It made the teapot look drunk.

Quick to catch my glance she said, " Ah, that. That was not meant for a teacosy, my dear, but for a hat. Grosjean designed it exclusively for me in 1936. I am not in sympathy with male milliners. A man should make roads and bridges, not hats for actresses. This hat came in a box, and the box was in a green paper bag. I was having tea at the time. So I put the hat on the teapot to keep my tea warm, twisted the green paper bag into an intriguing shape, and wore it with an emerald. For a week after that, women wore paper hats. You can put that in your article if you like.

" I love an article with human interest and a touch of the bizarre. Here is another bit of nonsense: when I first went to New York two of my trunks were misdirected, so that I discovered at the last moment that I had no evening dress. Now the shower-curtain in my hotel bathroom had a charming design of black fishes and white fishes upon a dull yellow ground. The fabric was a kind of oiled silk. I took it off the hooks, draped it upon myself, fastening it with an immense topaz—and it was a sensation. For you see, I am so odd-looking that the preposterous is becoming to me.

" But you must have your story. You are a lucky boy; I do not like to talk about myself, and I do not like what they call ' inside dope.' How many volumes did the greatest of biographers devote to Dr. Johnson? And what emerged? A bully and a glutton. And you want to portray Bella Barlay in an *article*? "

Bella Barlay closed her eyes for a few seconds, smiling her provocative, close-lipped, lopsided, triangular smile. Then she said, " I think I will tell you how I became an actress. Take it down, if you please. It is an amusing story . . . " So she told me, in a dreamy, reminiscent manner; but she always kept an eye on her watch.

Although I was a born actress, my background is not actually theatrical. My parents were rich, but not otherwise distinguished. I always remember them as a pair of those soft, gentle, pastel-

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coloured birds that seem to cease to be when you separate them: it is impossible to imagine one alone, they can exist only in couples. Everybody in Budapest liked the Barlays for their sympathy, and because they were so genuinely happy together.

It did people's hearts good to see them exchanging their delicate little courtesies and to hear how, so frequently, they spontaneously said exactly the same thing at precisely the same moment. When they did this they would blush slightly, make chains of little fingers, and make a wish. And, of course, each wished the other happiness.

The Hungarian—when not otherwise engaged—is a sentimental and romantic creature, and so my parents had a wide circle of quite sophisticated friends. Horrid old dukes, notorious for their cynical dissipations, used to come to drink coffee at our house simply to enjoy the luxury of an afternoon's sugary remorse. "Ah, if only I could have been like that!" they said; and went away much refreshed to make a wild night of it.

My mother was the only daughter of a wealthy landowner, and my father had inherited a title and a comfortable fortune. They had no earthly cares. Yet it would seem that their bliss was not quite unadulterated. They had been boy-and-girl sweethearts and, during their long and innocent courtship, they had playfully talked about the family they were going to have after they were married. I can see them in my mind's eye, hand in hand in a summery garden, playing their pretty little game of make-believe.

Do not smile, my friend—there is nothing more deadly serious than a child at play, and nothing that happens to him in later years can ever be so good or true as that radiant dream in the sunlit garden.

They decided, my poor parents, that they were going to have a son. There was, I believe, some battle of flowers about his name, but they agreed at last that he must be called Annibal. He was, as I surmise, to come into the world prefabricated at the age of four in the image of one of the cupids in the museum; spring into adolescence looking like somebody or other's statue labelled Youth Holding Dove; and pass gracefully into Apollo.

For a year or two before her marriage Mama was, somewhat to her mother's embarrassment, already talking of little Annibal as if he were well on the way. But to remonstrate with her would have been too much like mocking at a child.

According to my old friend and master, Jean de Luxe, my sweet, infatuated father was as silly if not more so. The nearest they ever came to argument was when, six months before their wedding, Papa asked her whether he should send the growing Annibal to

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Horvath or to La Salle for fencing lessons. She protested that she would not have her Annibal fighting with swords, and my father argued that it was his Annibal as well as hers—and what if, when papa was too old to fight, some brute insulted the boy's mother?

Good old Jean de Luxe (even the most levelheaded of our friends found themselves involved in this silly fantasy) settled the matter by saying to my mother, " But, my dear, he will have wrists of steel, the eye of a hawk, and will fence like the Three Musketeers."

In due course they were married one idyllic day in spring—alas, so long ago!—and all the countryside and half the city danced at the wedding. The health of Annibal Barlay was drunk almost as if it were a christening. And thus this lucky couple went into their dream world in a great radiance, and everybody waited more or less breathlessly for little Annibal.

My grandmother, completely befuddled by this myth, had a gold christening mug and spoon engraved with the monogram *A.B.*; and even my paternal grandfather, who was supposed to be an astute man, put down a hundred dozen bottles of a very fine Tokay for Annibal's twenty-first birthday.

He argued that, in case of accident, he could drink them up himself; but it was easy to see that Annibal had captured his imagination, too.

Hence, time went by and my parents' friends began playfully to ask, " Where's Annibal? "

The Hungarians are a romantic people, but they take their nonsense seriously. They hate to be disillusioned, and there is nothing more dangerous than a disenchanted romantic—that is why the Hungarians are always revolutionaries. It was not that my father was a coward exactly. He feared nothing but the ice-cold nakedness of exposure to everybody's laughter; for we Hungarians are great jokers, but our jokes are not to be laughed at.

Therefore, after a little while, telling the world that Annibal was to be expected in due course, and pleading my mother's health, he took her to the Italian Riviera—what time she and her old nurse, Ilonka, occupied themselves with tiny garments of china-blue to match Annibal's hypothetical eyes.

I may add that Ilonka, a burly peasant woman who could have balanced my mother on her great hand like a celluloid doll, was already fully convinced of her duty to Annibal, and did a lot of fine sewing for him in advance. Such is the power of suggestion.

Months passed. No Annibal. But—understand me—the less he was, the more he was! Ilonka was convinced that if my mother

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and father said that there was an Annibal, and her hands encompassed nothing, then *she* was somewhere at fault.

At last, one fine evening while Papa and Mama were at dinner, with a joyous cry, between two spoonfuls of chocolate mousse, my mother, laying down her spoon, cried, " Annibal is here! "

Thereupon Papa wept, and the household was turned upside-down. Ilonka, as my mother's personal nurse, became an intolerable tyrant. It was like Hans Andersen's fairy story about the emperor's new clothes, with a different twist: the clothes were there, but the emperor was not. Nobody ever saw such a turmoil of washing and nursing, of disinfecting and window-sealing, of whispering and tiptoeing, for my imaginary brother Annibal in his secret chamber.

Gifts came in: spoons, silver-gilt mugs galore, cashmere layettes, and so forth. Everyone plunged into the spirit of the jest, being half convinced by now that there must be *something*—some canvas to support all this embroidery—*some* thread to give shape to this tenuous, lacy conception.

So Annibal came into being without ever having been born, and so he grew up. Jean de Luxe has told me—he was a cool old impresario—that, more than once, when my parents talked about the child they hadn't got, he was hard put to it to keep his hands in his pockets for fear that he might applaud, and had to bite his tongue so as not to cry, " Almost perfect, children! Enough for today! Same time tomorrow! "

This, you must understand, was before I was born. I am only fifty-nine years of age. Annibal would be nearly seventy by now—if he had ever existed. Poor Annibal—ah-ah! You see how easily one slips into the pattern of a tapestry?

Time came when Annibal was old enough to have an English governess and a French tutor—Miss Smythe and Monsieur de Mans—who also entered into the spirit of Annibal, but fell in love with each other and ran away to get married, to my parents' outraged disgust. What would servants think of next?

After that Annibal was sent to school, from where he sent home remarkably intelligent letters, which were quoted, not read. His grandparents remembered his birthdays, when there was generally a celebration with fireworks; only Annibal was, on such occasions, confined to his bed with an infectious disease—or there was a contagion in the neighbourhood to which it might be dangerous to expose him. In this smooth, ready-made manner my fictitious brother Annibal reached the age of eleven years. And then something unforeseen happened.

My mother, on her thirtieth birthday, announced to my father that she was, in truth, going to present him with a *real* child.

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Now there is a considerable difference between an imaginary child and one of flesh and blood. I believe that the English essayist, Charles Lamb, was very eloquent on the subject of dream children—diaphanous things that came in imagination into the firelight, when he had taken a little too much gin. Charming! But he should have had me!

I was ninety-nine per cent meat and voice, and did not care who knew it. He would have refilled his pipe and dreamt a different dream. Furthermore, as far as my mother was concerned, she learnt reluctantly that there is a certain inconvenience connected with the bearing and raising of a child, which is on the whole an earthy creature in itself. Call a baby a crock of screams and dreams. Enough.

This real child of my parents was to be born about August, under the sign of Leo the Lion, by which token it was to be dominant and creative. Mama at once visualised him as a kind of poetic genius of military aspect with a blond moustache; a sort of General Wolfe, quoting Gray's *Elegy* while attacking the Heights of Abraham. Its name was to be Béla, after one of our national heroes.

Imagine my parents' horror when, instead of a dream, *I* was born!

Now, with nearly sixty years of poise and savoir faire behind me, I am still nothing much to look at, but as a child, Jean de Luxe has assured me, I was like something out of a comic strip.

As he said, " It is not that I mind frogs, but I find it unnerving when a frog wears a frilly blue bonnet and makes a noise like a cat." He was my godfather, and a broad-minded man—and he should have known.

I was, on the same authority, an intolerable nuisance, subject to all the more exasperating diseases of childhood, such as whooping-cough, croup, thrush, mumps, chicken-pox, tonsillitis, adenoids—anything to offend the sensitive eye and ear—and I had what are now known as allergies. There was no scientific name for them then; it was simply said that such-and-such a thing did not agree with you. I was allergic to feathers, every kind of vegetation, and even to milk; so that in the lap of luxury I suffered from malnutrition, got rickets, and had to have irons on my legs for two or three years. My other allergies brought me out in giant hives and sent me into convulsive fits of sneezing.

No doubt I suffered; I don't remember. It is certain that my poor parents did. You have, in your time, awakened out of a bright dream like Caliban, and cried to sleep again? So it was with Papa and Mama.

As dreamers will, they kept me, the reality, out of sight as

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much as possible, and comforted themselves with the splendid vision of Annibal. My mother who had learnt a little ladylike water-colouring, made dream pictures of Annibal in various stages of his development. The artist recently commissioned to paint a family group had had to add an imaginary portrait of Annibal standing at my father's right hand and holding a book. I appeared as a noncommittal bundle of flounced muslin in my mother's lap; in the background, landscape with trees.

Now I am not saying that they, bless them, were in any way unkind to me. It was not in their character to be unkind. Only there was, as far as I was concerned, what the psychologists might call, I think, a mental block: a kind of emotional stoppage. I was less real to them than the enchanted mist which was Annibal. And, do you know, although I was a child of wonderfully quick wit and perception, I was eight years old before I realised that there was no such person as Annibal!

I discovered this terrific fact for myself. Hampered by my weak legs, I was debarred from active play, so I used to make myself as happy as I could in my own cloud cuckooland, reading fairy tales and playing with my dolls, of which I had a prodigious family, each one with its own little characteristics. And the dolls became more real to me than my own father and mother—from this, I think I derived some understanding.

Also I had a dog, a great wolfhound, whom I called Gelert because he would have fought for my sake. I used to tell Gelert stories, some of which I had read, but the best of which I had got from my dear old nurse, Ilonka. She was from the Rumanian border, and could tell a tale.

One night she told me about Zerbin the Woodcutter, who helped a fairy in distress and was, therefore, granted three wishes. Zerbin's first wish was that his bundle of wood should cut itself; his second, that the sticks should gather themselves together and tie themselves up into a faggot; and his third, that instead of his carrying the bundle home, the bundle should carry him. All went well—stick stuck to stick, a vine came of its own accord and bound a huge faggot which sprouted four legs so that Zerbin could ride home as on a horse.

He could have asked for the kingdoms of the earth, but this was the limit of his understanding, do you see? So he straddled his load of firewood like a lord; and now, if you please, it did not run fast enough for him! He cursed it and beat it with the back of his axe—upon which, the spell being broken, the collective bundle of sticks resumed their individualities, the knot in the vine gave way, and Zerbin the fool found himself sitting all alone with everything to do again.

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Now, I find a moral in this story. But then, I liked to think that it was true. So, having caught and released a beautiful dragonfly in our garden—identifying it with the fairy in the tale—I made a bundle of twigs and told it to carry me back to the house.

Then a cloud came over the sun—it was the shadow of dear old Ilonka, come to bring me home for supper. As she tucked me under her powerful arm, I remember crying, " I let the fairy go, but my bundle of wood wouldn't carry me home! I wasn't going to hit it, Ilonka."

" That is only a silly old story," she said, kissing me.

" A lie? " I asked.

" No, Miss Bella, a lie is different. A lie is something you tell to deceive people. A lie is wrong, but a story is good. A liar, little sweetheart, is worse than a thief; a liar will swear your life away. But a storyteller is as good as a holiday among new things —he opens the world."

I persisted, " But what if a story isn't true? What if you tell a story and it deceives somebody and he believes it? The story about Zerbin the Woodcutter wasn't true—"

" Oh hush, my darling," Ilonka said, " you will see enough of truth before you are a hundred years older. Be thankful for a soft bed and a silly old nurse who knows how to tell a tale. Grown-ups also like to believe impossible stories; even I. Believe and be happy. Enough."

I nodded, and said no more. I realised that there is more to truth than blind faith in a persuasive voice. I was swindled, and my heart was sore.

In one step I had achieved a height of pity and of scorn which only defrauded children may reach.

Young man, when you disillusion a child you may spark such an explosion of blind enlightenment as might blast you out of the world! The child will become wise to you, and the wisdom of a child is terrible. All of a sudden—poor me!—I knew that Annibal was a silly story round which my father and mother had built their lives. Thinking of my own shock of revelation, and loving my kind papa and mama as I did, I lay awake half the night wondering how to explain to them that there was no Annibal.

My first gesture was to give away all my dolls and my story books. I never wanted to see them again.

Meanwhile, I wondered to whom I could turn for advice; for I was only a child. Yet I had come to consider my parents as younger and weaker than myself, poor sensitive old things that needed to be sheltered from the facts of life. They were caught fast in the web of their fiction. And even stout Ilonka was with them in her heavenly-earthly way.

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To whom then could I turn but that worldly-wise gentleman, the theatrical producer, Jean de Luxe? To him I uncovered my bruised being, while he fed me hot chocolate at an elegant pâtisserie. I said to him, "Monsieur de Luxe, if Papa and Mama may have a dream-child, why should I not have dream-parents? I shall make them behave as *I* want *them* to!"

"No, no," he said, with a burst of laughter, "not so fast. Excellent as the idea is, you have not yet the wherewithal to carry it out. You are, God help you, my love, through too much talking to your dogs, and to your dolls, and to the butterflies and the wolves that you make with the shadows of your hands on the wall, an actress: a pantomimist and a diseuse—undisciplined, I grant you, but with a natural talent. Still, I do not think that you could, without direction, handle an imaginary set of parents.

"But you might deal with what is already in the Barlays' imagination. I mean Annibal. Remember, from now on, Annibal is your big brother and you are his adoring, crippled sister. You love each other, and there are secrets between you . . ."

Now Jean de Luxe gave me a small magazine and made me read it silently but thoroughly, carefully turning the pages; then he took the magazine away from me and made me make the same expressions and perform the same actions over and over and over again, until empty space had bulk and weight.

At intervals he told me to reach up and hug him with all my strength; in due course withdrawing himself, so that all my muscles were geared to fling themselves about an imaginary man in thin air, while Jean de Luxe stood by and chuckled, "Far from bad! Bear in mind that henceforth Annibal sends you affectionate private letters. Not at regular intervals. Sometimes Thursday, sometimes Monday. And when you receive these letters, you smile like Mona Lisa."

It is difficult to make a mysterious smile when you are swollen and sticky with selfconsciousness, and have a brace on your teeth, as I had. Thus the time came when letters were addressed to me in beautiful copperplate handwriting. The envelopes generally contained a small sheet of paper with a few scribbled words, such as: *Having read this, you little imp, scream, "Annibal is interested in Scientific Agriculture!" Then, with a hop, skip, and a jump, make your exit. Burn this!*

And I did precisely what old Jean de Luxe said. Letter by letter, I almost drove my poor parents mad. But my good father, always recovering himself first, said to my mother, "Wilhelmina, the curse of my family has been a lack of the agricultural sense. Sheep shave the grass like so many razors where steers might graze or crops rotate. We are lucky in our Annibal."

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Whereupon Mama would see him in English riding-breeches and boots mounted on an Arab horse (snow white, naturally,) surveying a cover-design of a landscape in emerald green and gold, studded with embroidered peasants and suitable black-and-white cows. As a finishing touch, at his horse's heels, two dalmatian dogs, exquisitely spotted . . .

But sometimes, when I threw myself into more than ordinary ecstasies, they exchanged uneasy glances; and I was now convinced that there was some hope for them, because they knew in their hearts that they were dreaming, and felt in their souls that it was wrong to impose their dreaming upon me. Loving them all the more for this, I became quite intolerable in my sisterly affection for the unborn Annibal. You have to be cruel to be kind, as the proverb says; and if there is anything crueller than a precocious eleven-year-old girl, may I be preserved from it!

Soon I was receiving a letter every other day and, in obedience to Jean de Luxe's instructions, dropping tantalising details such as, " Annibal has had a duel about a girl and . . . but I promised not to tell! " Or, " Annibal has grown a golden moustache, and the wife of the—" My father took to walking up and down, while my mother lost weight.

Thus—oh wise old Jean de Luxe!—I won my battle, jab by ruthless jab, letting my kind-hearted enemy defeat itself by the power of its own wrong-headed confidence. For I was striking at a hollow bag. Believe me, the poets are right—love conquers all—meaning, of course, true love for that which *is*. You can love a dream only within a dream, but the sleeper wakes to a loneliness, an emptiness, because a dream cannot love you in return and the purest love starves itself hollow left to itself.

Hence, after a few months of imaginary correspondence with my nonexistent brother Annibal, the day came when I uttered a fine outcry and thrust de Luxe's last letter into what was later to become my bosom. It slipped through a hollow in my chest and lodged in my bodice.

" Darling, what is it? " my mother asked.

Father cried, " Yes, what is it? Speak! "

I had to be given sal volatile before I answered, " Annibal has married the daughter of a farmer—a widow with three children, from Soskut—and he is sublimely happy. She is only twenty-six, and looks younger."

" What the devil is this foolishness? " my father asked in utter consternation. " Soskut? "

I went on, " That's what Annibal says. Annibal says that there is no worse run-down farming area in Hungary. Annibal says the water is brackish and the people are backward. Mama

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always wanted Annibal to be kind to the people, Annibal says, and Annibal says that Papa always wanted him to identify himself with the working classes. So he married Sari, and he is going to bring her home!"

"Exactly when?" my father asked, in a voice like nails going into an empty cardboard box.

"Day after tomorrow," I replied, clapping my hands. "Oh Mama, may I have a new white dress, and will there be something for Sari's father? Annibal says he likes slivovitch, but he'll drink brandy if he can get it, or even wine. Sari's brothers like wine, Annibal says—"

My father broke out in agony, "Damn what Annibal says! Where did you pick up all this?"

But my mother, looking at him beseechingly, begged him to be still and, with a troubled expression on her charming face, asked me if she might read Annibal's letter. Dancing from foot to foot I sang, "Annibal says I mustn't; Annibal says I mustn't," until my unhappy father rushed out of the room clutching his head, while my mother sank into a chair and called for spirits of camphor.

I was tempted, then, to fling myself upon her generous breast and confess everything; but the actress in me was already uppermost. I danced out and wept in Ilonka's lap, but she did not know what I was crying for. And I am not deceiving you, my friend, when I say to you that although I have played Camille while I had hay fever when the golden-rod was out, and once played Titania with congestion of the lungs and a broken ankle, that was my most punishing role.

A day passed. Then another. At last our butler, Arpad, came in with an appearance of distress, and said, "Sir, Madam, there are some people—I do not know what to do—but they say they have the honour to be related to this family. There is with them, it seems, Monsieur Annibal. What shall I do?"

I spared everyone trouble by screaming, "*Annibal!*" and rushing to the door to embrace, with all the art Jean de Luxe had taught me, somebody who was not there; some imaginary person about six foot tall and broad in proportion. I swear I almost defeated the law of gravity and clung to empty air. It was a good performance, especially when I led Annibal into the room by the hand and said, "Papa, forgive him."

My parents were aghast. But imagine their reaction when, in all-too-solid flesh, the family Annibal had married into came in!

His wife came first, a buxom Slovak blonde, leading a chain of children in various stages of objectionableness. Then followed her mother, a monstrous, simpering woman who kept curtsying

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to the butler; and her father, a brutal son of the soil who kissed my father on both cheeks, banged him on the back, and demanded something hot and strong to drink. In the rear came three of the most loutish oafs you ever saw in your life, who called for wine and kept fondling everybody.

Jean de Luxe had hired them, of course. They were actors, and they acted well. But my father could find nothing to say, until my putative sister-in-law, Sari, held up one of the children for him to kiss. Then he roared, "What the devil is this confounded nonsense?"

Taking my cue—Jean de Luxe had foreseen everything—I said, "Oh Papa, say something to Annibal!"

At this he burst out, "What Annibal? Where's Annibal? Whose Annibal? To the devil with Annibal! Get these people out of here."

Sari said very solemnly, "Sir, do you deny the very existence of Annibal?"

My mother answered for him, and said with a dignity that touched my heart, "Madam, we have only one child, by God's grace: our daughter, Bella." And she clasped me to her breast.

The old man shouted, "What, no Annibal?"

My father replied, "No! Only Bella."

And then, do you know, he seemed to grow younger and taller, straighter and lighter, like a man relieved of a burden. He broke into an uncontrollable laugh. "No, there is no Annibal, and never was, thank heaven!" he cried.

It is marvellous to see the effect of an old lie dying on the spot—it is as if the whole universe shakes its head to clear it, and sighs a weight off its chest. "If you have an Annibal, take him away, and much good may he do you. Bella, my sweet, kiss me and forgive me for a fool!"

"Pardon me, too," said my mother.

Then, the unwelcome visitors having gone away laughing, I began to cry, and was much comforted.

After that there was no happier family than we three, and my easy-going dreamy father became a realist and an extrovert. With my mother's encouragement, he speculated. He lost every penny he possessed. So, with Jean de Luxe's help I went on the stage, and supported them both in comfort for the rest of their lives. But I never married, and I do not dream.

"And how do you like that story?" Bella Barlay asked, smiling her three-cornered smile. "You have been very busy with your notebook."

I had to ask, "Is it really true?"

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Here her face underwent a transformation. You have seen a leafless tree on a bleak horizon in winter, and it has filled you with a feeling of desolation; but suddenly the sun shines through and lends to its nakedness a glory and a refulgence. So her old face became irradiated.

"With development, it could be a good idea for a play," she said.

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★ ★ ★

ROUGH PLAY——

I had a large target made of cork, just in the wings, and forty of the English soldiery, played by students from the University of Harvard; forty of these stalwart fellows were to shoot their arrows into the wings right into the cork target.

However, the revolving stage started to turn a little bit too soon! The turntable slowly moved so that instead of looking off-stage left we were looking straight into the audience and forty bows and arrows were pointed right into the theatre, and I thought to myself, "Well, they're University fellows, they're not just going to shoot into the audience."

And so with a certain amount of confidence I launched into the great line—"Cry God for Harry, England, and St. George." There was a tremendous roar and I noticed with horror that the roar was from the audience—because indeed they had shot the arrows into the audience. Forty of them! We even scored a direct hit on the dean of Chicago's drama critics.

ORSON WELLES, quoted in
The Fabulous Orson Welles, by Peter Noble

——DIRKY WORK

The climax of the festivities was a nocturnal fête champêtre in honour of Nelson's victory in 1798 . . . The nine-year-old Prince Leopold, his mother's darling, dressed as a midshipman, raised the laurel wreath from the waxen admiral's brow and placed it on that of the living one, thanking him for recovering the realm. Nelson's one arm hugged the little prince and his eye was wet as he thanked him on his knee.

Lieutenant Parsons, who left a sprightly account of the occasion, said that the fairy-scene surpassed Vauxhall on a gala night. His shipmates, in their excitement, could not resist charging the King's footguards with their dress-dirks, so that one brisk lad was shot through the thigh by an outraged guardsman and Nelson stopped their leave for six months.

HAROLD ACTON, *The Bourbons of Naples*

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YOU who recall the tale of the secret ingredient added to the recipe for Chicken Royal Surprise by means of which Monsieur Armand Bonneval, proprietor of the Auberge Château Loiret on the Loire, won his two-star rating in the famous Guide Michelin, bible of the touring gastronome, will be astonished to learn that this was not an unmixed blessing.

In ordinary circumstances this designation would have guaranteed Monsieur Bonneval, retired Chef of the Cordon Bleu, and Madame, his faithful partner through life's vicissitudes, an old age of ease if not of affluence. But considering what, weather-wise, the previous season had been like abroad, the circumstances were not ordinary at all.

In fact, so miserable had it been—wet, cold, and stormy—that it drove all the visitors away from France, southwards to Italy and Spain in search of sun, bringing Bonneval to the brink of bankruptcy, the loss of the Auberge Château Loiret, and of his life-savings which it represented.

The five crossed spoons and forks and two stars that Monsieur Bonneval had won for his great dish meant that his was a superior restaurant with an excellent cuisine, " worthy of a detour," and a " must " stop for lunch or dinner en route past the châteaux.

But it also required the proprietor always to have on hand an

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CHEF D'OEUVRE

BY PAUL GALLICO

adequate supply of the delicious but expensive Loire salmon, prohibitively-priced lobsters and langoustes, sweet water crayfish, legs of lamb, poulets de Bresse, duck from Nantes, truffles from Perigord, goose-livers from Strasbourg . . .

When the customers came, the profit was adequate if not handsome. But when they did not, as happened during that disastrous season, the spoilage was catastrophic. Now Monsieur Bonneval found himself unable to meet the interest payment on the mortgage due on the auberge, and likewise lacking money to discharge his obligations to the provisioners.

Thus, on one of those wretched end-of-October days, with the rain pouring down in torrents after a severe all-night gale, Monsieur Bonneval sat with Madame in the little office where she kept the cash accounts and sought for some means of evading the ruin that stared them both in the face.

" If we could only win the lottery," sighed Madame Bonneval. She was a stout, red-cheeked woman with fine eyes, who believed in God and her husband.

" Or receive a small unexpected legacy," brooded Bonneval.

Short, rotund, clad in classic light-blue trousers, white coat, napkin about his neck, and high stiffly-starched chef's toque on his head, he looked exactly like what he was, a kind man and one of the great cooks of France.

But alas, the letters which Madame Bonneval was engaged in

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opening consisted of accounts pressing for payment, circulars, and a police handbill warning of a dangerous criminal at large.

There had been an unhappy spate of such notices recently, with the usual ugly rogues'-gallery photograph of some desperate character wanted for murder, kidnapping, or bank robbery, and more often than not the warning: *Dangerous! May be armed! Notify the police at once if you encounter this man.*

Such notices were sent regularly to Monsieur Bonneval in his capacity as innkeeper, and he was supposed to display them prominently, which however he did not do, considering such a spectacle depressing to the appetites of his clientele.

"Oh, là là," murmured Madame Bonneval, "but here is a wicked one indeed!" as she drew forth the police handbill with a photograph of a lean man with a fierce, beaked nose. But Bonneval had eyes only for the black type topping the sheet:

500,000 FRANCS REWARD!
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?
IF SO, NOTIFY THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY!

"Five hundred thousand francs!" he cried. "Exactly the sum we are lacking to save us. Ah ah, it is unkind of Fate to remind us so violently of our insoluble dilemma."

"He must have done something fearful for them to offer so much," his wife remarked. "I read of a frightful murder in Paris a week ago. A fellow cut the throat of his mistress, and placed the corpse in a cistern. This one looks quite capable of it."

Together they read the description: *Goes under the name of Henri Blanchard; six feet four inches tall; extremely powerful physique; age between fifty and fifty-five; slight cast in left eye; old scar running from right eyebrow to jawbone . . .*

Madame Bonneval shuddered. "The poor girl! The paper said that she was nearly decapitated."

"I don't doubt it," Bonneval commented. "Hah! If it were only our good fortune to have him appear here, our troubles would soon be over."

"You mean he would quickly murder us both," shrieked Madame Bonneval. "Heuh! Do not ask for such a thing."

But Monsieur Bonneval, it seems, *had* asked and Fate was already organising the reply. For at that very moment, no more than a kilometre away, up the road leading from Blois there trudged a tall man with a beaked nose under a battered hat, his worn clothes and knapsack soaked by the driving downpour.

It was the custom of Monsieur Bonneval, when a client or party arrived at his inn, to make a brief appearance at the service door of the dining-room to appraise them. For when he went to

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work on a dish he liked to have a mental image of the person who was going to enjoy it, to know whether he was lean and hungry or fat and well-fed, whether he looked like a bon viveur or gourmet, a bourgeois, a tourist, or a gentleman. He felt that this knowledge aided him in his creations.

Thus, on this rainy autumn day when Monsieur Bonneval heard the scrape of a chair in the dining-room and saw Odette, the waitress, give her hair a pat before going in, he stepped as usual into the doorway for reconnaissance.

What he saw caused him to turn as white as his coat. For he recognised immediately, seated, menu in hand, at a side table in the empty room, Henri Blanchard, murderer.

Certainly he answered every descriptive detail of the man Madame Bonneval decided had brutally slain a young girl in a Left Bank Paris attic. There was the great size, the powerful frame, the beaked nose, greying hair, the cast in one eye, and the sinister disfiguring scar from temple to jaw. There could be no mistaking him.

A frisson of terror ran through Monsieur Bonneval's portly frame as he contemplated the formidable customer, but along with the shudder a wave of joy, also. For seated likewise at the table, in the person of Henri Blanchard, were 500,000 sorely-needed francs.

A man of rapid decisions, Bonneval quickly signalled the waitress back, whispered in the ear of Brazon, the man-of-all-work—so as not to alarm Céleste, the kitchenmaid—setting him to watch the front door, and then nipped round through the passage that ran behind the dining-room to the front of the house and joined Madame Bonneval in her office.

There he slid back a small panel in the wall, permitting a glimpse into the dining-room. "Maman," he cried, "look there. Tell me what you see."

Madame Bonneval applied her eye, gave a shriek, and seizing the black-japanned cashbox, proceeded to conceal it beneath her many black petticoats. "Armand! It is he, the murderer!" She appeared about to faint as, remembering the handbill, she quaked, "He may be armed. We shall all be slaughtered."

"Pssst, woman! Keep quiet!" the chef hissed. "Do you not realise it is the opportunity of a lifetime? I will telephone the police. They will come to arrest him. We shall collect the reward and pay the interest as well as our bills."

Strangely, Madame Bonneval did not react to this as Bonneval expected. "Oh, Armand," she said, "do you think that is right? He is a human being after all. Blood money is never lucky."

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"Are you out of your senses?" Bonneval whispered. "This is the answer to our prayers. Keep your eye on him. Brazon is watching at the other door."

He seized the telephone to connect with the gendarmerie at Blois, thirty kilometres distant, and the nearest police post capable of coping with so dangerous and valuable a customer. The sorely-needed 500,000 francs was practically in the till.

Yet, not quite. For no sooner had Bonneval picked up the receiver to listen for the buzzes, clicks, wails, hums, and cracklings which would indicate that the machine was activating itself than he realised that on this of all days, the telephone—never a fully developed invention in France at any time—was silent. As a matter of fact, the great windstorm during the night had taken down the lines between Loiret and Chaumont, and the instrument contained not so much as a whisper.

The only alternative then was for him to leap swiftly into his ancient shooting brake, and drive to Blois to alert the authorities. Yet, even as he rushed into the courtyard where the vehicle stood, he was aware of a serious dilemma. If he went himself, he exposed Madame Bonneval to a dangerous killer. And if he sent Brazon to break the news, he risked losing the reward or a substantial share of it.

The car solved this impasse for him as Monsieur Bonneval trod on the starter. Water from the torrential rain had managed to intrude itself into a sensitive chamber in the engine reserved to petrol. The resulting dilution caused the ignition to respond with a splutter and a sigh, after which it went as dead as the telephone. With 500,000 francs and a dangerous man at large in the dining-room, Monsieur Bonneval found himself with neither means of communication nor transport.

It was enough to try the stoutest heart. Yet stout-hearted was an exact description of Monsieur Bonneval when the survival of Madame Bonneval and himself was threatened. The telephone, it developed, when Brazon nipped over to the tiny exchange nearby, might be a matter of two or three hours, one could not say exactly.

The garage men fetched in haste estimated the same time to mobilise the vehicle. But by that time, Henri Blanchard would be many kilometres away, and the reward for his apprehension lost to them for ever.

Unless . . . Unless . . . A plan formed itself.

Shaking, inwardly, Monsieur Bonneval entered the dining-room, presented himself at the table occupied by the fugitive, and said, "Bonjour, monsieur. I am sorry you have been kept waiting. What may I serve you?"

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The stranger replied amiably enough, " Waiting does not matter. It is good to be out of the rain. A plate of soup, a little bread, a glass of wine."

Monsieur Bonneval thought, Ha, playing the innocent, eh? You do not realise that I know all. The cast in Blanchard's left eye made him look shifty, the nose gave him an aspect of ferocity, the scar an appearance of evil.

" Eh, now," said the host in his most seductive voice, " soup, a crust, and a glass of wine? Impossible at the Auberge Loiret. You must permit me to create a meal for you."

Had Blanchard not appeared so sinister, his smile might have seemed wistful. " You are good," he said, " but forgive me, I am poor and a stranger here. I cannot afford more."

Monsieur Bonneval thought, Ho ho, you smooth villain. And your wallet probably bulging with stolen notes.

Aloud he said, " No, no! I will not hear of it. I was about to prepare something special for Madame and myself, to keep my hand in. With this wretched weather we have not had a customer for days. You will see, it will cost you no more than you can afford."

" If you are so kind then," the huge man replied, his eyes lighting up, his voice slightly hoarse.

" To begin with," temporised Monsieur Bonneval, racking his brains for dishes that would be not only succulent but a long time in preparation, since it was his bold and ingenious plan to keep Blanchard there by the art of his cookery until either the wretched telephone or the miserable vehicle should be restored to him. " But, of course. Mousseline de Saumon de Loire Dijonnaise, a recipe of my old friend, host of a famous restaurant in Dijon."

The formula for preparing this superb creation was unreeling through his head. Pound in a mortar a half-kilo of magnificent fresh salmon. Force the pounded flesh through a strainer, and work it again lovingly in the mortar, incorporating little by little three to four cups of pure sweet butter, two fresh eggs, two egg yolks, a delicate head of lettuce parboiled and forced through a sieve, a tablespoon chopped chervil, two tablespoons chopped parsley, one and a half teaspoons salt, freshly-ground pepper, and a pinch of nutmeg.

Work for thirty minutes with a wooden spatula in a bowl placed in ice. Stir in two cups whipped cream.

An attractive three-quarters of an hour would be occupied by this step.

And this, the chef recalled with immense satisfaction, was but the beginning.

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Turn this delectable mixture, the recipe continued, into a buttered ring mould, and poach it over hot water for forty minutes.

In an hour and a half, that wretched shooting brake might have composed itself.

Unmould the Mousseline on a round platter and place in the centre the twenty-five finest cooked crayfish tails or shrimps, and thirty small mushroom caps sauté'd in butter.

Then occupy yourself with the following sauce: to two cups warm stock made of the bones, head, and trimmings of the salmon, add one cup cream combined with four beaten egg yolks. Heat gradually, stirring. Do not let the sauce boil. Add five tablespoons butter, a little at a time, and the crayfish or shrimp essence obtained by cooking the crayfish or shrimp shells in butter, adding a little hot water and reducing. Serve over and with the Mousseline.

By this time life could have returned to that salaud telephone.

"If you think . . ." said Henri Blanchard.

"But of course. First, however, an appetiser. Ha! Œufs Meurette will be just the thing. After the Mousseline, I suggest a dish from the Auvergnat made famous by my old colleague Monsieur Laronde—Escalope de Veau à la Brune et à la Blonde. Then, to finish, an Omelette Norvégienne."

"A meal fit for a king!" said Henri Blanchard.

Or the last dinner of a condemned murderer, thought Monsieur Bonneval, but aloud said, "Of course, it will take a little time. Everything is freshly cooked."

The wanted man smiled. "I have nothing but time," he said.

Time! Ha ha, Bonneval thought to himself, that is what you think, my villainous-looking friend. But it is the guillotine that awaits just round the corner.

He returned to the kitchen through the pantry, but then quickly scuttled via the passage to the front office where he cautioned Madame Bonneval. "Signal to me immediately the telephone functions again. I will deal with him in the meantime."

"Oh, Armand! I am terrified for your life."

"Never fear. I will tame him with my cooking. For, once he has tasted my first dish, he will never leave."

And this indeed proved to be the case.

When the Œufs Meurette appeared, afloat in a sauce compounded of bacon, garlic, onion, and red wine, Blanchard sniffed, passed a hand over his brow as though he was in a dream, fell to, and in a short time put away the entire quantity of the recipe of eight eggs intended for four persons, causing Monsieur Bonneval to gape, for the chef had a true admiration for big eaters, holding

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with regret that they were a vanishing species. But the Mousseline, when at last Monsieur Bonneval brought it in triumphantly and set it before his unsuspecting victim, had an even more outstanding effect.

Henri Blanchard regarded the composition for an instant, the delicate pink mould, the tantalising parade of crayfish tails, the exquisite sauce, and a tear ran down his cheek and fell on to the plate. Then he tasted the first mouthful, and turned upon Monsieur Bonneval a smile which, to the host's horror, transfigured his face most astonishingly. "Oh, mon cher chef!" he murmured, deeply moved.

The horror was that, for an instant, the smile seemed to wipe all the evil from his countenance, leaving Monsieur Bonneval badly shaken as he watched the man again devour the portion for four with undiminished appetite. For, Monsieur Bonneval found himself suddenly asking in his mind, what really was an evil face. A flaw in a retina, a misfortune of birth, a beak nose, a family inheritance, a scar caused by an accident? The smile had nullified them all.

Was it not easy to find a wicked gleam in the eye of almost anyone, a smirk, a baring of the teeth, a disarrangement of the hair, an irregularity in the walk, a twitching of the fingers, leading one to imagine one is to be butchered on the spot? But then Bonneval's mind returned to the police notice which left no room for doubt. He went into the kitchen to complete the weaving of the culinary net about the man he intended to betray.

But, truth to tell, his conscience was far from easy as he set about pounding six thin escalopes of veal quite flat, and cooked them slowly in butter a fine golden brown on both sides. For the words of his wife were weighing upon him: "He is a human being after all. Blood money is never lucky."

True, the 500,000 francs was desperately needed. Yet the sum was to be obtained at the price of the life of a man who had shed a tear over his Mousseline and called him, "My dear chef."

Thoughtfully Monsieur Bonneval removed the meat, adding a half cup of white wine to the pan, stirring, then adding another half cup of strong veal stock flavoured with a tablespoon of meat glaze. He reduced and thickened the brown sauce slightly with a teaspoonful of potato starch.

A drastic idea came to him. Madame Bonneval suffered from migraine and frequently took a sleeping powder. Two of these added to the sauce would guarantee the presence of Henri Blanchard until the police came, as well as spare Bonneval the reproachful look at the betrayal. When Blanchard woke up he would be in gaol.

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Bonneval the archconspirator actually held the powder in his fingers. But Bonneval the master chef found himself unable to add them to the mixture, for who could tell what undesirable alteration in flavour might result?

Disposing of it in the waste bucket, he stuffed a pound of cooked white mushroom caps with chopped ham and pâté-de-foie-gras; then with the mushroom stock, heavy cream, and egg yolks he confected one and three-quarter cupfuls of cream sauce. A sudden vision of Blanchard's head laid upon the block of the guillotine assailed him, inducing in Monsieur Bonneval a shudder that almost caused a fatality to the sauce.

Now, with care, he heated in butter six slices of Normandy ham on both sides just long enough, and then arranged the escalopes of veal and ham slices alternately on the serving platter. Glancing at the clock he noted that it was four in the afternoon, three hours since his dangerous guest had arrived. It did not make him happy.

Filling in the centre of the veal and ham ring with the stuffed mushrooms, he carefully spooned the aromatic brunette gravy over the meat and the magnificent blonde sauce over the fungi. Then he carried it in to Henri Blanchard.

The reaction was spontaneous and startling.

A look, a sniff, a taste! Then the man rose to his feet and folded Monsieur Bonneval to his breast with his enormous and powerful arms. A good thing that Madame Bonneval was engaged on the telephone at that moment, and not applying her eye to the panel in the wall, for she would have thought certainly that Bonneval's last moment had come.

"Maître!" exclaimed Blanchard, and then he cried, "Magus!" or magician.

To his surprise, Monsieur Bonneval found himself with his eyes quite moist, returning the pressure. "Friend," he said, "Grand gourmet! Connoisseur! Bon appétit! Enjoy yourself. I go to prepare the Omelette Norvegiénne for you."

It was only when he was delicately folding the ten stiffly-beaten eggwhites into the soufflé mixture of four yolks, mixed with a cup of sugar, almonds, and a glass of 1901 Armagnac, that it came to him he had been wrapped in the embrace of a murderer.

The next instant, a lightning bolt smote him as he clapped his hand to his sweating brow; he was riven by the thought that Henri Blanchard must be innocent. For no man who loved good food and cooking, and so appreciatively filled his belly with it, could be a murderer. In all the history of crime there was no record of a hungry or even starving gourmet having slain anyone. The two were incompatible.

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Have you ever, Monsieur Bonneval would have asked you, after a satisfying repast, when you sat half drowsy, hands folded over paunch, the fragrance of the good cigar still lingering, re-memorising the tastes, flavours, aromas, the blends and clashes of spices, colour and texture of meat, fish, or fowl, the subtleties of the sauces, the airiness of the soufflé, contemplated murder?

But when the mind is not on food . . . you might suggest.

The mind of a great gourmet, Monsieur Bonneval would assure you, is always on food.

At this moment, the startled chef became aware that Madame was signalling frantically to him from the passage. When he went to her she whispered, "The telephone is restored. I have been through to the police at Blois a short while ago. They will arrive in less than ten minutes now."

"Woman," Bonneval cried, "what have you done? You yourself declared that it was wrong to accept blood money—"

"But, Armand! It was only because I feared for your life!"

There was not a moment to be lost. Frantically, Bonneval burst into the dining-room where sat Henri Blanchard, the last vestige of Escalope Brune et Blonde scraped from the platter, an expression of ineffable bliss upon a face that now appeared not only handsome but even somewhat noble.

"You must fly!" Bonneval shouted. "All is known. The police will be here at any moment!"

The violence of Bonneval's entrance brought Henri Blanchard to his feet, and for an instant he looked stupefied.

"Fly?" he said. "Where to? Why?"

"You are accused of murder. There is a reward of 500,000 francs offered for your apprehension; but only I, Armand Bonneval, know that you are innocent. Go now, while there is still time. You must leave the country at once."

"But I have no money with which to leave the country. And I have never murdered anything but a little white paper."

"Ah ah, but once the police have captured you they will see that you go to the block. Wait here an instant."

Bonneval rushed into the little office and, opening the cashbox, extracted eighty thousand francs. It was their last reserve, but his conscience was very bad for he knew that he had come close to selling the life of a fellow man.

Returning to the dining-room he thrust the notes into the hands of Henri Blanchard.

"Here," he said, "take this. It is all I have. It will get you across the border."

But it was already too late.

From without came the wailing of sirens, the squealing of

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brakes, the slamming of car doors, the running of feet. Monsieur Bonneval had time only to leap to the sideboard and seize a carving-knife and fork with which he ranged himself fiercely before Henri Blanchard as the gendarmes, led by a lieutenant, burst into the room.

"You shall not take him. He is innocent. Advance at your peril!" Bonneval challenged.

But the gendarmes made no attempt to advance, and only ranged themselves opposite the tall man and his stout little protector, while the lieutenant consulted a copy of the handbill he had brought with him.

Finally the police officer spoke. "Monsieur le Duc," he said.

"Oh," said the tall man softly. "So that is how it is."

"Forgive this means of tracing you," the lieutenant continued, "but the word from Paris is that the lawyers are frantic. They know you never see newspapers or listen to the radio when you are abroad. I have to inform you that His Grace, your uncle, died some months ago. The message is that if you do not immediately assume the title and its responsibilities his entire fortune will be devoted to the propagation of the giant grasshoppers that were the subject of his lifelong research."

Blanchard said, "I am happier to remain poor, and a poet, roaming the highways and byways of France as I have done in the past."

There was a moment of silence broken uncomfortably by Monsieur Bonneval, who suddenly felt slightly ridiculous brandishing his massive knife and fork. "But the handbill: the charge of murder of that unfortunate girl!" he said.

The lieutenant turned to him with some amusement. "What are you talking about, little puff-pigeon? There is nothing here about murder, only that we wished to be put in touch with Henri Blanchard, here pictured."

Seizing the handbill, Monsieur Bonneval examined it closely as Madame Bonneval, Odette, and the others crowded into the room. It was true. The overheated imaginations of his wife and himself had supplied all the rest.

"Oh," he cried in such anguish that Madame at once rushed to his side and slipped her arm through his, "I am the greatest fool alive!"

Henri Blanchard said gravely, "Not the greatest fool but, surely, the greatest chef." He asked the officer, "How much time is there left to decide?"

"Only eight hours, under the terms of the will, Your Grace. We must drive you to Paris at once."

Henri Blanchard went to the window and gazed down the

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rain-swept road for a moment. Then he said to Bonneval, "If it had not been for you and your magnificent cookery, I should long have been down that road and free for ever, for tomorrow it would have been too late. So you took me for a murderer, and kept me here that you might gain the reward?"

Bonneval turned a brilliant scarlet.

"But when you became convinced of my innocence you thrust upon me your last sou to help me to escape. You have taught me that people may yet be generous, noble, and kind, Monsieur Bonneval."

He came over and placed his hand on the shoulder of the chef, saying, "But you have also taught me something else by the artistry of your creations; namely, that there is another kind of good life besides that of a wandering vagabond. The beauties of art of every kind await me. A rich man can support and perpetuate these beauties. I believe I shall essay this kind of life for a time.

"Besides—" he smiled suddenly— "I do not very much care for those giant grasshoppers . . ."

Henri Blanchard fingered the banknotes Bonneval had thrust upon him and, smiling, patted the little chef on the shoulder. "I shall need these when I arrive in Paris. But they will be returned to you manifold, along with the reward for my—ah—apprehension. Come, lieutenant, we had better hasten."

He strode from the room, followed by the gendarmes, leaving Monsieur Bonneval feeling a little ashamed, yet also deeply touched and extraordinarily happy. © Paul Gallico 1959

★ ★ ★

Not Quite Cricket

And it was, perhaps, from Manchester that there came the nicest story of Sarah Bernhardt in England: a story that showed her Frenchness and her anglophilia to perfection.

One afternoon, when she was performing in Manchester, she took a drive with a friend into the country. As they were passing a field they heard shouts and stopped the landau. Two local football teams were playing a vigorous football match, and, it being a wet day, were smothered in mud. Sarah climbed up onto the seat and, clad from head to foot in white furs, watched the contest with eager interest.

When it was over she climbed down and sank back into her cushions with a murmured: "*J'adore ce cricket: c'est tellement anglais.*"

JOANNA RICHARDSON, *Sarah Bernhardt*

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for a rainy day

I love you, will always love you,
I have told you again and again,
And it seems to me that you listen
As one listens to the rain.

ERIC LINKLATER

PHOEBE: (*She is suddenly panic-stricken.*) *Susan, I think he kissed me once.*
SUSAN: (*Startled*) *You think?*
PHOEBE: *I know he did. That evening—a week ago, when he was squiring me home from the concert. It was raining, and my face was wet; he said that was why he did it.*
SUSAN: *Because your face was wet?*
PHOEBE: *It does not seem a sufficient excuse now.*

J. M. BARRIE, *Quality Street*

Lightning Decision

"Rain," she said. They paused, looked upwards, and back; nobody seemed to have noticed it—yes, a few people were unfurling umbrellas, putting on coats, stopping their cars to lift the hoods. Suddenly the grey silk of the sky was lit with a scissor of lightning, and, over South London, thunder started slowly yet hurriedly on a long journey . . .

James and Felicia went on along Hampstead Lane; they were soon extremely wet, but it did not occur to either of them to turn back . . . All the remnants of day were gathered in the northern hemisphere of the sky; in the south and east, piled to an immense height, stood sculptural clouds, enormous, dark, with livid rims.

"O, Mr. Doré!" James exclaimed, in quite a different voice

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from usual, and flung his arm about Felicia's shoulder. The rain was trickling from their hair—Felicia had not resumed her hat. Smiling, each felt warm under a veil of wet. Their height was identical: he kissed her cheek, and then, as she turned her face towards him, her mouth . . . As they went into the Tube, he gripped her hand, and said without looking at her, "Felicia darling, you're lovely. I like you all wet."

E. B. C. JONES, *Helen and Felicia*

Rain Dance

Nagako-Kuni-San, silver girl,
Japan's most fragile doll:
I am devoured by love for your eyes:
I want you all.

Come and dance the dance of the rain,
You doll with an ivory fan:
Lips like the coral of an amulet:
Will they kiss me, and when?

For you I pray to Buddha among the lotus flowers
While the rain sings in the bamboo,
And at Kwanon I lit fourteen lamps
For the love of you.

Nagako-Kuni-San, the gods say
That your lips will never be mine,
And you will never reign in my pagoda,
Nagako-Kuni-San.

JULIAN COOPER, *Japanese Love Song*

Drought

At such times the gardener waters the soil with his sweat, in vain . . . and begins to say fatalistically: "We need a shower."

"And where are you going this year for the summer holidays?"

"I don't mind, but it ought to rain."

"And what do you think of the resignation of Mr. MacDonald?"

"I say that it ought to rain."

"Great Scott! Just think of a beautiful November rain; four, five, six days, the cold, rainy threads are murmuring, it is grey and chilly, and it goes to the bones—"

As I say, it ought to rain.

KAREL CAPEK, *The Gardener's Year*

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High and Dry

O Western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ, that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again!

ANON, *c* 1500

Outlook Settled

And so they tramped home. They said little: there seemed to be nothing left in the world worth saying. Pip carried both sets of clubs under his left arm. Occasionally he sighed, long and gently . . . Elsie marched beside him, with her arms buried to the elbows in the deep pockets of Pip's old jacket. (They were spacious pockets: one of them was sheltering two hands.) At intervals Elsie would look up at Pip, upon whose head and shoulders the rain was descending pitilessly. Once she said—

"Pip, you're getting awfully wet."

Pip looked down upon her for a moment. Then he looked up again and shook his glistening head defiantly at the weeping heavens.

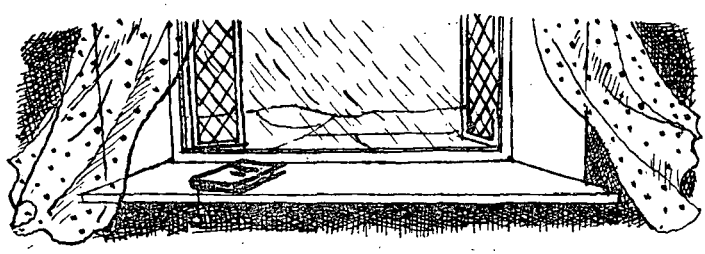
"Who cares?" he roared.

IAN HAY, *Pip*

Sweet and Low

Night whispers at our window, and the rain
Taps with soft fingers,
While we lie warm in one another's arms.
Oh, warm and firelit, listening—
Lazy and lapped in love—
Circled in fire and thorn. Beyond the pane
The forest of rain grows downward
To meet the forest of night.

PHILIP SPARROW, *Rainy Night*



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TRIAL BY DORY

The jarring of the ice
mingled with the whistling of the breeze

BY WILL R. BIRD

FOUR men were mending nets in a shack behind the fish wharf at Granny Cove. Spring had come grudgingly, but now the warm sun was melting the ice and sending steamy vapours from tarred roofs. The Cove front murmured with activity as all its men prepared for the sea.

The four worked in silence, seated on benches, half-hidden by the drab folds that hung from the crossbeams overhead, their hands flicking in and out among the meshes, tying, knotting, threading. All at once they paused and listened. There were new voices outside.

"Them's the two back from pulp-cuttin'," said Simon Holder. He was a small, lean man.

"Wonder if they got their pay," said Dick Berry, a red-faced man with big, bony shoulders.

The two working in the rear were young, and brothers, Ben and Matthew Crowdy, proud of being hired with Simon. Ben was only seventeen, and slim, but as serious as the other three.

"Ho, Willyum," shouted Berry, as a man passed the open door. "Don't rush yourself. What's the word down along?"

The man came back and peered in at them. "Not much new," he said. "They're havin' movin' pictures . . ."

"Movin'!" Berry's mouth fell open. "How?"

"The man's got a machine'n engine to drive her. He's over't Gull Point tonight givin' a showin'."

"Over't Gull Point!" Berry rose from his bench, his red face glowing. "Simon, let's go over."

"What's he chargin'?" asked Simon.

"Twenty-five cents, but he's got good pictures. There's one . . ."

"Don't tell us," blurted out Matthew. "That would spoil it. What say we go, Simon?" He had a solemn face, like Ben, but his eyes were bright.

Simon left his bench and went outside. The others followed him and they stood gazing at the sea.

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The ice was breaking up. The warm sun had been aided by a strong wind off land; a lane of black water was widening along the foot of the cliffs, while smaller leads angled in all directions, opening as the pack surged and loosened. Southwards, towards Gull Point, there seemed plenty of open sea.

"Risky," pronounced Simon.

"Chancy," agreed Berry, "but not too much."

"Wind's favourin', too," added Matthew.

There was a slow, shrill screaming of the ice. Floes and pans were grinding together; the harsh noises never stilled.

Ben looked up. There were no clouds and the sky was a blue that seemed to reflect the endless ice.

"Looks fairish weather," he said, "but it's comin' tonight."

"You boys got money?" asked Simon.

They shook their heads and Berry grinned.

"That means a dollar," Simon said gravely. "That's a lot of money."

"There ain't never been," said Ben, "movin' pictures up here. I never seen any in my life."

"Bet she's open to the Point," said Berry. "We'd do fine with a lugsail."

Simon rubbed his salt-bitten chin. The four of them were the best in the Cove. "Git geared," he said suddenly.

"It's six mile," Simon said an hour later. They had launched their dory and were well into the wide lead, but the lugsail was proving a menace. A stiffer breeze caught them and tipped the boat. He pulled the canvas in. "Mebbe we're fools."

They had lost much time. Matthew had broken a thole pin in his eagerness and they had not turned back to repair it. They had trusted in the sail, and his oars were idle.

"The wind'll be strong outside," said Berry. He was rowing and he grunted his words.

They were true enough. Once away from the shelter of the high, black cliffs, the wind caught the dory and they swung along sharply. There were many wide lanes and the sea was running higher than it had seemed, and spray flung over them.

Simon steered with a long sweep and Matthew was seated next him, squatted low but ready to lend a hand. As they swayed with the dory, all four seemed a jumble of sou'westers and oilskins.

They did not attempt conversation. The shrieking, jarring crashes of the ice mingled with the whistling of the breeze and drowned all lesser sounds. The rapidly-widening lane they were in became a sea of racing, tumbling water that spewed spray as it

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struck the dory. Simon's oilskins dripped and his cheeks were wet, but his expression never changed. He was gauging every wave with the instinct of one born to the sea.

Suddenly each man braced himself for action. A loose floe hove in their path and the waves pitched it about dangerously. Simon and Berry used all their strength and skill as they managed to avoid it, but neither man spoke. Matthew was bailing instantly, and they moved slowly until he had scooped from the dory the gallons of water shipped during the swinging manœuvre. It seemed, in that short time, to become night.

The rocky point behind them had cut off the sun as it sank rapidly, and with its going the wind keened to a penetrating chill. The darkness added greatly to their risks, and Matthew peered ahead.

"She's started to fog," he shouted. "She's a bank now."

The shore, hazy before, had become mist-drowned, shrouded with a thick, white, creeping veil. It seemed to permeate the air.

"She's come behind the same," yelled Ben.

They had covered half their journey, and a swirling blanket of grey vapours closed about them. They would have to chance their passage ahead where the contour of the coast veered, where the slow-moving field of ice might bar their way.

It was Matthew who first saw that they had entered a wide lane and were between shifting ice. He peered again.

"Keep straight on!" he cried.

Short waves were deluging the boat with freezing spray. Berry rowed with quick strokes, and the roar of wind and grinding ice filled the night.

The water became smoother. Matthew reached and touched Berry on the back, and at the signal the bigger man changed places with him. They were tense and watchful; only men of their experience could know the risk of a channel between rafted ice. Deep, booming sounds seemed to pass over them as though they had sunk in a trough of the sea, and it grew darker.

"Look!" yelled Ben. "She's closin' in."

There was a muttered undertone beneath the booming, and their lane of open water had narrowed to feet in width.

They slipped awkwardly in their sealskin boots as each man scrambled on to the floe, but they secured footing and with desperate, hurried strength dragged the heavy dory from the water. It taxed them to their utmost and no one spoke. The ice was an uneven surging field, and a blurred greyness covered everything.

"She's bad," said Berry. "We should have . . ."

He did not finish. There was a crash of giant floes colliding,

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and they were sprawled beside the dory. In an instant the night was a wilder chaos of wind and clamour.

"Watch out!" Simon's voice rose above the tumult like a cracking whip. "She's breakin'."

The floe buckled. It rose and lowered under them. There were sudden surgings that pitched them about. They seized the dory's sides and pushed landwards. The roaring of surf at the face of the floe came clearly.

"Watch her!" It was a scream more than a shout. The ice was parting.

The floe rocked and settled. Water sloshed over the ice, reached them. There was another settling.

"There!" yelled Ben.

The field had opened and the sea drove into the vent with foaming fury. It poured over the ice to meet them. Then its weight and the driving surf heaved the floe.

They slid backwards in the wash. Ben, caught by the dory, fell; and water lashed over him. He rose, sobbing with his immersion, clinging to the dory, and as if a signal had been given they rushed the boat towards the open water. The lane had widened into a broad lead.

Again the floe surged, and the dory slid into the water. Ben leapt into it, tilting it dangerously. Matthew sprang in beside him, rocking it to a safer keel. Berry had given a great thrust forwards to clear them from the ice, and as he sprang he lunged against Simon, knocking him backwards.

For a heartbeat it seemed they must capsize. The churning water had caught them as the dory took its plunge. Berry grasped his oars and threw his weight against the surge. Behind them, in the screaming murk, Simon was lost to view.

Ben had seized Simon's sweep, and they toiled to bring the dory about. The lane was a smother of surf. Danger hovered over every move and the water boiled with changing currents.

They drove back alongside, catching with perfect co-ordination a minute lull at the ice edge, and Simon, gauging their move, joined them. It was a risky plunge, challenging all their chances, but once more Berry's strength saved the dory, and then they had swung away and Ben was bailing.

In the thick darkness the surf seemed wilder than before, but the worst was soon behind them. Then, just ahead, a pinpoint of light shone steadily.

Within ten minutes they were in calmer waters, and lamp-glows began to pierce the gloom. They landed, and hurried Ben, shaking and almost numbed with cold, to the nearest house.

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" Us is from Granny Cove," announced Simon. " Ben were wet on the ice. Could us dry him here? "

" Sure, the stove's red-hot." A woman wrapped in a thick jacket and ready to leave for the hall, where the movies were to be shown, answered them. " I'll git a rig for him to put on, and his'll dry while we're gone."

Ben was shaking as with ague, and tiny pools formed on the floor beside him as the warmth of the stove softened his frozen clothing. He drank a scalding mixture the woman provided, and his trembling ceased. He stripped off his sodden clothing and Matthew ranged it on a chairback alongside the stove. Then Ben dressed in a makeshift outfit, and they followed the path the woman had taken.

The building where the movies were being shown was packed with people. It was a low-roofed structure and heated by a huge box stove. There were high odours of perspiration, and many faces were beaded with moisture. Children were sandwiched among their elders and every seat was taken.

Simon led the way along one wall and they stood against it, tightly wedged by others who crowded after.

Ben struggled from the borrowed reefer that blanketed him. " We're lucky," he gasped, " she's jist startin'."

There were gasps and murmurings as the lamps were extinguished and the hum of a motor began. Headings appeared on the screen and a dozen voices tried to read them.

" Let teacher read 'em," bellowed a husky voice at the rear.

" *She Knew She Was Wrong*," a high-pitched voice shrilled in the darkness as " teacher " assumed her task. " *Pretty Virginia* . . ."

The audience had stilled. It was seeing the incredible . . . mirrored eating-places . . . ladies with bare backs and cigarettes . . . bewildering dances . . . racing cars . . . a bathing beach teeming with thousands. And one face dominated.

" See that one! " said Berry hoarsely. " Her's—"

" Keep shut," ordered Simon in a sibilant whisper.

They watched the heroine driving in city traffic and there were cries of admiration. " Ho! " shouted Berry. " Look at she." He clapped his hands.

" She's won'erful sharp in steerin'," responded Simon, " but . . ." He couldn't express himself.

" Her smokes," objected Ben.

Another picture began and all voices stilled. It was a story of rival airmen, and the planes in action did marvellous stunting. A flight of machines gave a thrilling performance.

Berry tensed, his big hands gripping a seat back. Simon

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breathed with sharp little intakes. Ben and Matthew gave shrill exclamations, unable to restrain themselves.

"They're hittin'!"

"No—yes—there!"

"Lookit—lookit—*lookit*!"

A dozen voices yelled with him. The airmen were shooting earthwards at dizzy speed, headed towards each other.

There was a dull grinding sound and the screen went blank.

A lamp was lighted and the operator of the movie machine worked desperately with various tools. Then he came forward.

"Sorry, folks," he said, "but the machine's broke and I've got to send the piece away. I can't show any more."

There were sighs of disappointment but no one made a protest. They began filing from the building and the night was filled with excited voices.

Ben went to change his clothes again, and the woman insisted on them stopping to drink scalding tea and to eat slices of hard bread.

"Stay the night," she urged. "I've blankets enough to fix you up on the kitchen floor."

"No," refused Simon. "The fog's cleared and she's light as day. We've got a mortal sight of work to do, gettin' ready to fish."

Berry ate and drank hugely but said nothing. The unexpected ending of the show had given him vast disappointment . . .

It was breaking day as the dory swung to the wharf at Granny's Cove. The sea had been much rougher than they anticipated and they had been forced to keep near the shoreline all the way. For hours there had been only the creak of boat timbers and the slap of heavy water; each was silent and dull-minded.

A slight breeze stirred the morning. It was from the west and warm. There would be a perfect day. The sunrise began in a fire of orange and crimson that merged into soft pinks and changing blues. The heavens were a mass of colour.

The light spread over the hills and reached the sleeping houses. It found iced places in the hollows and they glittered like jewels.

They dragged the dory to its landing and stood away from it. Ben was bruised and stiff. Matthew had lost a mitten, and each was conscious of clothing damp with spray.

"We're back," said Simon tersely, "but it were worth it."

"Sure," agreed Berry, yawning mightily. "That girl were a prime one."

"It must be great," said Matthew, "to live where you kin see won'erful sights all the time."

The light strengthened and the sea was blue as sapphire where

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the sunrays reached it slantingly. Still they stood, as if each was labouring with thoughts he could not put into words. Then Simon spat and faced them.

"I don't know what youse think," he said, "but takin' all them risks to make a picture don't seem right to me."

Matthew nodded gravely. "Us been thinkin' just that," he said. "It's for nothin' but pleasurin', and it's queer there ain't laws to stop it."

"Sure," added Ben, "there should be a law ag'in it. They might have been killed."

There was no further comment. Smoke began to curl from a chimney. Ben yawned again. They had expressed that which stirred them most, so they turned and filed soberly to their homes.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to MICE, MEN, and MISCELLANEOUS

on page 34

1. *Tower on the Rhine, supposed to have been the site of the legend in which Bishop Hatto was eaten by mice.*
2. *Lilliputian faction who, according to Gulliver, started their eggs at the big end.*
3. *i. A man who feathers arrows; ii. a midshipman in the Royal Navy.*
4. *They are all accents:* ɔ ~ .. ʌ
5. *The nine of diamonds.*
6. *a. Caliph of Baghdad; b. Chicago gunman; c. François Rabelais' anagrammatical pseudonym; d. heroine of the ballad of Ben Bolt.*
7. *A narrow strip of territory in the U.S.A. lying between two other states.*
8. 32.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 152

Across. 1, *The Three Graces*. 9, *Villein*. 10, *Bespeak*. 11, *Renewable*. 13, *Total*. 14, *Manes*. 15, *Ladder*. 19, *Apache*. 20, *Wards*. 24, *Choir*. 25, *Alligator*. 26, *Dragoon*. 27, *Tancred*. 29, *Walking actress*.

Down. 1, *Tavern*. 2, *Enlink*. 3, *Hoe*. 4, *Ennobled*. 5, *Gibbet*. 6, *Alsatian dog*. 7, *Eventide*. 8, *Skylark*. 12, *Weathercock*. 16, *Cascade*. 17, *Panorama*. 18, *Barletta*. 21, *Cannon*. 22, *Starve*. 23, *Grades*. 28, *Not*.

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★ *An Argosy "first" story written this sun-drenched summer in Malaga, where the author was living: now off to Cape Town, Durban, and Swaziland, there are exciting plans for a book. The bones of it, we are told, are already there.*

OLD BLUE

BY J. M. G. LUTTMAN-JOHNSON

THE STRANGER with money in his pocket stood beside old Farnie. Both were deeply absorbed in watching the parade of yearlings: Farnie, with pride, because he had bred them; the stranger, eager to buy.

Among the press of elegant, honey-coloured horses there was one—jet black, ill-shaped—unhappily alien in colour and form. The man with money laughed. "What an old rocking-horse!" he said. He paid high prices for the colts he wanted, well pleased with their promise.

When he left, he turned as though remembering something. "Good luck with the old blue rocking-horse," he called, and his laughter was lost in dust and the muff of moving hoofs.

The boys who worked on Farnie's farm laughed the high belly laugh of Africans. "Ou' Blue!" they shouted with relish. "Ou' Blue Rockin'-Horse! Auw, auw!" they laughed.

So the name was born. Small black children called him Old Blue: old though the colt was young and soft boned, and blue when he was black, bible-black among his golden companions.

Only Jimminy knew better, for Jimminy had seen the sun strike blue sparks from the burnished coat which was his pride and privilege to groom. For Jimminy, Old Blue was the most beautiful horse in the world. Old Blue made him forget his one short leg which walked in circles whenever he hurried.

Jimminy's young-ancient face was flanked by bat-ears and topped with a peppercorn wig. He was small for his age, an urchin stableboy wearing patched trousers hitched up with string. He had never possessed a jacket, but for sheer swank he wore a pink handkerchief knotted round his tiny neck. Below this, dusky skin stretched drum-tight across his little potbelly.

Tedious jobs, dreary jobs, dirty jobs came Jimminy's way. The unskilled horseman, a hazard for promising bloodstock but

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not for a blue-black, unsaleable horse, was given to Old Blue.

The farm where they were born lay midway between the grand race-course and the great sea. Each morning, black grooms would ride their charges down to the beach—Aandvlakte's Beach it was called, because here the famous Aandvlakte Stud was exercised—delicate legs strengthened in the surf, sometimes deep, sometimes dwindling as it surged or dragged back reluctantly.

Jimminy's job was to sweep and to sweeten the stables with new straw. The black horse, having no price on his back, seldom saw the sea.

Aandvlakte's farmhouse was long and low and built in the form of an H, as were most Cape houses in the late eighteenth century. Here old Farnie lived alone, if a man surrounded by servants can be said to live alone. He himself laughed at the thought. " How can a man be alone," he would ask, " breeding and planning and dreaming of horses? "

At times the long west wind drove Atlantic rollers far up the beach, and their roar could be heard in the house. Then old Farnie would reach for his violin; and Africans, huddled in their huts, would hear the thin, gay sound of his fiddling riding the wind-torn night.

Men visited the farm to buy Farnie's horses. Women came because he was rich. Farnie entertained them well, fed them well, and was glad when they left. He accepted this as part of the business of horses, bringing him nearer that final triumph, that flame-dancing, swifter-than-light, winged Pegasus. He dreamt his golden dreams, cherished his golden horses.

One day there came to the farm a man from the city. He had money but no knowledge of horses, because his town knew only the fume and splutter of engines. " Go to Farnie," they told him. " No man in Africa knows more about horses."

So he came to Aandvlakte early one autumn morning when the grooms were down on the beach with the mares and foals. With frank pride, Farnie said, " They are a fine sight, there on the beach. Go down and see for yourself."

It fell to Jimminy to take the stranger. He wanted to ride Old Blue but the stranger mounted him under Farnie's eye.

Jimminy followed on a pony of fabulous price, dancing light, quick to respond. As they topped the ridge, Jimminy drew in his breath. Blue sky, white sands, sequined sea stretched before them. They saw the foals racing, tails and manes awash in the wind; the mares stepping high with powerful beauty; and the quiet sea coming and going beneath them.

If only I had been riding Old Blue. If only . . . And from the

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horse's agate eyes flashed an equal longing, or so Jimminy thought.

They rode slowly over the sand dunes down to the sea. The sparkle and the salt air and the happiness in him made Jimminy's head reel. Exhilaration passed from him to his mount. With one accord, rider and horse moved faster. The wind pressed and the earth thundered. Jimminy crouched like a small black monkey.

It could have been hours or seconds before Jimminy was aware of Old Blue on his heels. The black shot past, his rider stiff-legged, clinging to saddle and mane. Old Blue's acting like a crazy colt, thought Jimminy.

The grooms checked their mounts and stared after him. All watched him take the sea at full speed, sending a fountain of spray over his rider. Then Old Blue halted so suddenly that the man flew from the saddle. Relieved of his burden, the horse swam on out to sea.

No one had eyes or compassion for the stranger. All followed Old Blue as he swam away powerfully, head high, black mane coming and going in the deep sea green.

A rock reef curved from the shore, disappeared and rose again a hundred yards out to sea. The horse, heading for the horizon, must pass close to this rock. They saw him rise, fall back, and rise again as a roller lifted him and crashed over the reef.

When the water flattened, Old Blue was standing firmly, four feet on the rock. As he shook himself free of salt water, sun-shafts caught the flying spray. It was like a frieze—black horse, black rock, a halo of spray.

Jimminy fought to keep back his tears. There was only temporary safety on that distant rock. Old Blue would drown when the tide came in. Farnie must be told. Farnie must save him. Jimminy tore himself from his agony and raced back.

Farnie was nonplussed. "Damn Old Blue! How can anyone rescue a horse from a sea that neither man nor boat can breast?" He picked up the telephone. The response was immediate.

A van with staff and ropes arrived, but the eager party was a little dismayed when taken down to the beach. Larger than life, it seemed, Old Blue stood squarely on the rock, tail and mane streaming on the wind. Between them and Old Blue, a hundred yards of green-and-white water swirled.

"This is a job for the lifesavers," they said. "They have equipment."

Someone was dispatched to summon the lifesavers, the bronzed Tarzans who guard South Africa's beaches, rescuing unwary bathers from overstrong currents.

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Time passed. The tide-tug drew the high water deep into the ocean. Jimminy's heart was as empty as a sucked-out egg-shell.

The news of a horse at sea spread through the little town. Equipped with cameras and cars the Press raced to the beach.

Then came a hitch. The lifesavers were municipal employees. They had undertaken to rescue men, not animals. Before they could rescue Old Blue they must have the mayor's permission.

Wires buzzed. Down to the beach, Aandvlakte's Beach, hurried the mayor and his voluntarily gathered councillors.

Four o'clock and the tide was rising. The wind, too. Tanned lifesavers with their wheel of ropes, their lifebelts, and their willingness, waited. The breakers crashed on the sands at their feet, each time more violently, surging higher.

The mayor and his councillors were in deep discussion.

"Was it right," they argued, "to risk the lives of men for a horse?"

"We must wait," they said.

"The sea is too rough," they said.

"A west wind is rising. Tomorrow . . ."

Jimminy heard nothing of their talk. He watched the sun move towards the horizon. While there was light he could be sure that Old Blue was safe, but if he was still there when the sun went down. . . At this point, always, Jimminy dragged back his aching thoughts.

Men walked up and down, gesticulated, did nothing.

With a flourish of red, the sun disappeared. Magnified against a crimson sky, Old Blue Rocking-Horse stood immense, powerfully cast in iron, a seahorse with wings, a blue Pegasus.

With the swiftness of night in the southern hemisphere, horse and rock and sea were gathered to the darkness. Rising wind and flying spume brought a tang of salt to lips. Dark sea sounds now replaced sight.

Press and councillors left. The headlamps of their cars drove receding tunnels of light through the night. The lifesavers packed up, promising to return in the morning. Black grooms, farm boys, and children, talking with the loud clear talk of Africans, followed. Lastly Farnie, getting into the mayor's car, slammed the door. "Tomorrow," he said, "tomorrow! But tonight the tide will get him."

No one noticed that Jimminy had remained. No one knew that Jimminy's eyes pierced the dark. "As long as I am watching," he told himself, "as long as I don't close my eyes for a moment, Old Blue won't drown." On him alone now, Old Blue's life depended; and the dawn was a long way off.

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Crouched beside a rock, Jimminy threw out his lifeline of faith.

Stars moved slowly across the sky. The child's heart, overburdened with hope and longing, pressed hard against his throat. His eyes ached with their concentration, but he did not fall asleep.

The west wind blew. Small black boy and large black rock were part of the great wild night. Back in the old farmhouse, Farnie reached for his fiddle.

At the peak of the wind and the tide's full strength, Jimminy thought he saw, in the black-and-white toss of waves, a shadow move. He ran with his crooked run to the water's edge. The shadow came and went. Hoping, not daring to hope, he peered through the dark. Then he was sure.

As Old Blue's hoofs touched land, the horse rose above the water's level. Like a strange and wonderful sea creature, growing larger and larger, he came straight to where the child stood. Knee-deep in surf, Jimminy threw his arms round the horse's wet neck. Seaweed and seawater enveloped them both.

Who can say that the incoming tide, rather than the child's faith, had brought back Old Blue? In Jimminy's mind, there was no doubt, no doubt whatever.

That sixth sense possessed by the Press, a flair for news unknown to ordinary mortals, whipped a young journalist from his bed when the stars were still a smudge in the sky. The wind had died down. In the clean of an unbroken day he drove to Aandvlakte's Beach.

He was not surprised when his eye swept a clear horizon, an unbroken reef of rock. No man, he mused, certainly no horse, could have withstood the night's wind and tide.

"And so, no scoop!" he said aloud. He walked to the water's edge, kicking the sand. The freshness of the dawn touched him. He walked, glad to be thinking of nothing, glad to be all sensation, feeling the air, tasting the salt, expanding, expanding . . .

Suddenly, his ears pulled the rest of his body violently to the top of a sand dune. His ears had heard the unmistakable shaking of a bridled horse.

Then he saw them . . .

A few yards away, lying curled up asleep with his head on a saddle, was Jimminy. Beside him, Old Blue Rocking-Horse quietly cropped the grass. © J. M. G. Luttman-Johnson 1959

CORRECTOMY IF I'M WRONG

Doctor: The man who tells you that if you don't cut something out, he'll have to.

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From the author of . . .
MY BROTHER MICHAEL
Argosy's brilliant new novel

Edinburgh,
June 1959

Dear Editor,

You asked for some biographical notes to use with "My Brother Michael." I'll do my best, though I can never honestly see why anyone should be interested in the who, where and why - of me! J'écris, donc je suis.

But if you must know who and where: I am by calling an English don, who used to lecture at Durham University. I am married to the Regius Professor of Geology at the University of Edinburgh, and I live in that city.

What led me to write "My Brother Michael"? Another unanswerable question: I don't know, except that I have been in love with the idea of Greece all my life, and the novel wrote itself out of the recent history of that most exciting country.

I have talked to Greeks and Cretans who fought both against the Axis invaders and in the Communist putsch of 1944. If I have made mistakes, I hope that those who know better than I could, will forgive me. They at least had the luck to be there. I'd give quite a lot to have been with them.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Mary Stewart

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My Brother Michael

By MARY STEWART

IT was a popular and crowded café. I had found a table at the back of the room near the bar. All along the outer wall big glass doors gave on to the pavement, standing open to the dust and din of Omonia Square which is, in effect, the commercial centre of Athens. The traffic crawled or surged past in a ceaseless confusion. Crowds—as jammed as the traffic—eddied on the wide pavements.

The sound one remembers in Athens is not the clamour of the impatiently congested traffic, or the perpetual hammer of pneumatic drills, or even the age-old sound of chisels chipping away at the Pentelic marble which is still the cheapest stone for building . . .

What one remembers about Athens is the roar of talking. Athenian voices arguing, laughing, talk-talk-talking, as once they talked the world into shape in the busy colonnades of the Agora, not so very far from where I sat.

I pushed my coffee-cup aside, drew again at my cigarette, and began to read over what I had written.

> I've just come off the boat from Crete. I can't believe that there's any place on earth more beautiful than the Greek islands. Now there's Delphi still to come, and everyone has assured me that it'll be the crown of the trip. So I've left it till last. The only trouble is, I'm getting slightly worried about the cash. I suppose I'm a bit of a fool where money is concerned. Philip ran all that, and how right he was . . .

I turned the page, reaching forward absently with my left hand to tap ash from my cigarette. There was a paler circle showing

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still against the tan at the base of the fourth finger, where Philip's engagement ring had been. In ten days of Aegean sunshine it had begun to fade.

I admit there's another side to this Great Emancipation. Things do seem a trifle dull occasionally, after years of being swept along in Philip's—you must admit—magnificent wake! I feel just a little bit high and dry. You'd have thought that something, some sniff of adventure, would have happened to a young woman—is one still young at twenty-five?—marooned on her own in the wilds of Hellas, but no! Nothing ever happens to me! I go tamely from temple to temple, guide-book in hand.

I must get to Delphi somehow, but I'm afraid I may have to scamp it in a one-day tour. If only I could afford a car! Do you suppose that if I prayed to all the gods at once . . .?

Someone cleared his throat just above me. A shadow crept half-apologetically across the page.

I looked up.

It wasn't the waiter trying to winkle me out of my corner table. It was a little dark man with patched and shabby dungarees, a greasy blue shirt, and a hesitant smirk behind the inevitable moustache. His trousers were held up with string, which it appeared he didn't trust, because he held on to them firmly with one grimy hand.

I must have looked at him with a chilly surprise because the apologetic look deepened, but instead of going away he spoke in very bad French.

"It is about the car for Delphi."

I said stupidly, looking down at the letter under my hand, "The car for Delphi?"

"You wanted a car for Delphi, non?"

The sun had probed even into this corner of the café. I peered at him against it.

"Why, yes, I did. But I really don't see how—"

"I bring it." One grimy hand—the one that wasn't holding up his trousers—waved towards the blazing doorway.

My eyes followed the gesture, bemusedly. There was indeed a car, a large, shabby-looking, black affair, parked at the pavement's edge. "Look here," I said, "I don't understand—"

"Voilà!" With a grin, he fished what was patently a car key from his pocket, and dangled it above the table. "This is it. It is a matter of life and death, I understand that—oh, perfectly. So I come as quick as I can—"

I said with some exasperation, "I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about."

The grin vanished, to be replaced by a look of vivid anxiety. "I am late. This I know. I am sorry. Mademoiselle will forgive me? She will be in time. The car—she is good, oh, a very good car. If mademoiselle—"

I said flatly, "I can't afford it."

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His face lighted at once with a very white-toothed and singularly attractive grin. " Money! " The word was contemptuous. " " We do not speak of money! Besides," he added with great simplicity, " the deposit is already paid."

I said blankly, " Deposit? Paid? "

" But yes. Mademoiselle paid it earlier."

I drew a breath that was three parts relief. It wasn't an intervention of the ironic gods of Greece. It was a simple case of mistaken identity.

I said firmly, " I'm sorry. There has been a mistake. That is not my car. I didn't hire it at all."

The dangling key stilled for a moment, then swung in front of me with unimpaired vigour. " It is not the car mademoiselle saw, no, but that one was bad, bad. It had a—how do you say?—a crack in it that the water came out."

" A leak. But—"

" A leak. That is why I am late, you see; but we get this car, oh so good, since mademoiselle say it is so urgent a matter that Monsieur Simon have the car at Delphi straight away. You leave straight away, you are in Delphi in three hours, four hours—" his look lingered on me momentarily, summing me up—" five hours, maybe? And then perhaps all is well with Monsieur Simon, and this matter of life and—"

" Death," I said. " But the fact remains, monsieur, that I don't know what you're talking about! There is some mistake, and I'm sorry. It was not I who asked for the car. I gather that this, er, Monsieur Simon's girl was to have been in this café waiting for the car? Well, I can't see anybody here at present who might fill the bill."

He spoke so quickly that I realised afterwards he must have followed my rapid French only sketchily, and was pouncing on a phrase that made sense—the sense he wanted to hear. The key still swung on his fingertip as if it was hot and he wanted to drop it. He said, " That is it. This café. A young lady sitting alone. Half past ten. But I am late. You are Simon's girl, yes? "

He looked, with that bright brown uncomprehending gaze, so like an anxious monkey that my near-exasperation vanished, and I smiled at him, shaking my head, and summoned up one of my six hard-learnt words of Greek. " Ne," I said, as forcefully as I could. " Ne, ne, ne."

I laughed and held out my cigarette-case. " I'm sorry there's been a muddle. Have a cigarette."

The cigarette seemed to be an amazing cure-all for worry. The lines vanished magically from his face. The vivid smile flashed. The key dropped with a jingle in front of me, while the hand that wasn't holding up his pants reached for my cigarette-case. " Thank you, mademoiselle. It is a good car, mademoiselle. Have a good journey."

I was feeling in my bag for matches; and not until I raised my head did I really take in what he'd said. And by then it was too

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late. He had gone. I caught a glimpse of him sliding through the crowd at the café-door like a whippet let off a string; then he vanished. Three of my cigarettes had gone, too. But the car key lay on the table in front of me, and the black car still stood outside in the violent sunlight.

It was only then, as I sat gaping like an idiot at the key, the car, and the sunlight on the cloth where a moment ago the little man had cast a shadow, that I realised that my momentary piece of showing-off was likely to cost me pretty dear.

I remembered a little sickly that, in Greek, ne means yes.

I ran after him. But the crowd surged and swayed on the pavement, regardless, and there was no sign in any direction of the shabby messenger of the gods.

I went back to my corner, picked up the key, and elbowed my way towards the bar-counter to seek out the proprietor.

The proprietor heard me out and then said something in Greek to the men at the counter, and became on the instant the centre of an animated, even passionate discussion which lasted some four or five minutes and involved in the end every male customer in the café. This eventually produced, with all the goodwill in the world, the information that nobody had noticed the little man with the key, nobody knew the car, nobody had ever heard of a Monsieur Simon at Delphi—this though one of the men was a native of Chrissa, only a few kilometres distant from Delphi—nobody thought it in the least likely that anyone from Delphi would hire a car in Athens, and, finally, that nobody in their senses would drive it up there anyway.

"Though," said the man from Chrissa, who was talking with his mouth full, "it is possible that this Simon is an English tourist staying at Delphi. That would explain everything." He didn't say why, merely smiling with great kindness and charm through a mouthful of prawns, but I got his meaning.

I said apologetically, "I can't help feeling one ought to do something about it. The man who brought the key said it was—" I hesitated—"well, a matter of life and death."

The Greek raised his eyebrows; then he shrugged—matters of life and death were evidently everyday affairs in Athens.

I turned back to the proprietor, who was struggling to scoop olives out of a jar. "You wish to leave the key with me?" he asked. "I will take it, and then you need have no more worry."

"I won't trouble you yet, thanks. I'll wait here for a bit, and if this girl comes I'll give her the key myself." And to the proprietor's relief, I wriggled back out of the press to my table.

I waited an hour watching, in an expectancy that gradually gave way to uneasiness, the constant coming-and-going at the café door.

When Simon's girl arrived to claim the car, it might surely be possible to suggest—or even ask outright—that I might be her passenger as far as Delphi.

The possibility of getting a lift up to Delphi was not the only one which had occurred to me . . .

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At twelve o'clock, when nobody had appeared to claim the car, I thrust my plate aside and set myself to consider that other possibility as coolly as I could.

It was, simply, to drive the car up to Delphi myself.

It was apparent that, for whatever reason, the girl wasn't coming. The car—the urgently wanted car—was still here, already an hour and a half late in starting. I had with me everything that I needed for a short stay in Delphi. I could go up today, deliver the car, and come back with the tourist bus on Thursday. The thing was simple, obvious, and a direct intervention of Providence.

I hesitated with my hand touching the key . . .

It couldn't be done. It was just one of those things that couldn't be done. I must have been mad even to consider doing it. No one would thank me for intervening in an affair that, in spite of my silly mistake, had nothing whatever to do with me. The obvious —the only—thing to do was to leave the car standing there, hand over the key, and go away.

The decision brought with it a sense of relief so vivid, so physical almost, that it startled me. I stood up, snatched the car key, and swung my knapsack over my shoulder. As I folded my unfinished letter to thrust it into my pocket, a sentence caught my eye again. *Nothing ever happens to me.*

The paper crackled suddenly as my fingers tightened. I suppose moments of self-knowledge come at all sorts of odd times. I have often wondered if they are ever pleasant. I had one such moment now.

I found myself once more at the counter, handing a slip of paper across it to the proprietor. " My name and address," I said rather breathlessly, " in case someone comes for the car later on. Miss Camilla Haven, Olympias Hotel, Rue Marnis. Tell them, I—I'll take care of the car. Tell them, I did it for the best."

I was out in the street and getting into the car before it occurred to me that my last words had sounded uncommonly like an epitaph.

Even if it wasn't Hermes himself who had brought me the key, the hand of every god in Hellas must have been over me that day, because I got out of Athens unscathed.

There were some sticky moments. There was the shoeblack who was so urgent to clean my shoes that he followed me to the car and clung to the side and would certainly have been hurt when I started off, if only I'd remembered to put the car into gear.

There was the moment when I turned—at a cautious ten miles per hour and hugging the left-hand pavement—out of Omonia Square into St. Constantine Street, and met a taxi almost head-on on what I thought was his wrong side. There was the encounter in the narrow alley with two furious pedestrians who stepped off the pavement without a single glance in my direction. How was I to know it was a one-way street? I was lucky with my brakes that time. I wasn't so lucky with the flower-donkey, but it was only the flowers I touched, and the driver was charming about it.

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All things considered, people were very forgiving. The only really unpleasant person was the man who spat on the bonnet as I came hesitatingly out from behind a stationary bus. There was no need for such a display of temper. I'd hardly touched him.

By the time I got to the main road that leads out of Athens along the Sacred Way I'd discovered that the shabby black car had an unexpectedly powerful engine. If it had been less shabby and ancient-looking—if it had been one of the sleek-winged, trans-atlantic monsters commonly used as taxis in Athens—I should never have dared myself to drive it. I hadn't been in it three minutes before I discovered that it had an acceleration like the kick of a jet, and by the time I'd assessed its possibilities as a lethal weapon—which were limitless—it was too late. I was out in the traffic and it seemed safer to stay there.

I kept my eyes on the road, my attention on the car, and drove as fast as I dared. Soon the industrial country was behind us, and the road, narrower now and whitening with dust under the pitiless September sun, lifted itself away from the shore and wound up between fields of red earth set with olives, where small box-like houses squatted, haphazardly it seemed, among the trees.

A woman, black-clad, and veiled like a Moslem, bent to lift bread from the white beehive oven that stood under an olive tree. Scrawny hens scratched about, and a dog hurled itself yelling after the car. Donkeys plodded along in the deep dust at the road's edge, half hidden under their top-heavy loads of brushwood.

A high cart swayed along a track towards the road; it was piled with grapes, gleaming waxily, cloudy-green. The flanks of the mule were glossy, and bloomy as dark grapes. The air smelt of heat and dung and dust and the lees of the grape harvest.

The sun beat down. The only relief was the breeze of the car's movement, and the cloudy heads of the great olives sailing between the road and the brazen bowl of the sky.

There was very little traffic out in the heat of the day, and I was determined to take full advantage of the afternoon lull, so I drove on through the hot bright minutes, feeling confident now, and even secure. I had got the feel of the car, and I was still steadfastly refusing to think about what I had done. I had taken a "dare" from the gods, and the results would wait till I got—if I got—to Delphi.

My confidence in myself had been steadily growing as I drove on through country that became wilder and more beautiful as the road shook itself clear of the olive groves and climbed the hills that lie to the north of Attica. It even survived the frightening hairpin bends that sink from the summit of these hills towards the Boetian plain. But it didn't survive the bus.

This was the service bus from Athens, and I caught up with it halfway along the dead-straight road that bisects the plain. It was small, evil-looking, and smelly. It also seemed to be packed to the doors with people, boxes, and various livestock, including hens and at least one small goat. It was roaring along in a fifty-yard trail

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of dust. I drew carefully out to the left, and pressed forward to pass.

The bus, which was already in the middle of the road, swung over promptly to the left and accelerated slightly. I moved back, swallowing dust. The bus went to the crown of the road and settled down to its rackety thirty miles an hour.

I waited half a minute, and tried again. I crept cautiously up to its rear wheel and hoped the driver would see me.

He did. Accelerating madly, he surged once again into my path, got me well and truly behind him, and held solidly to the crown of the road. I went back once more into the choking dust-train.

We passed a board which said, in Greek and English letters: THEBES 4 km., DELPHI 77 km. If I had to stay behind the bus all the way to Delphi . . .

I tried again. This time as I pulled out to approach him, I sounded the horn decisively. To my surprise and gratitude, he drew over promptly to the right, and slowed down. I made for the gap. There was just room, no more, between the bus and the verge, which was of deep, crumbling dry soil. Taut with nervous concentration, I pressed forward and accelerated. The bus rocked and roared alongside.

I wasn't getting past. He was travelling faster, keeping pace with me. My car had the speed of him, but the gap was narrowing and I wasn't sure enough of my judgment to force the big car past. He closed in more sharply. I don't know if he would actually have forced me off the road, but as the swaying, dirty-green enamel rocked nearer I lost my nerve, as he had known I would.

I stood on the brakes. The bus roared on. I was left once more in the dust.

We were getting near the outskirts of Thebes when I realised that, of course, a service bus would have to stop for passengers. The thought steadied me. I drove on with my eyes fixed in hatred ahead of me. There was nothing left in life at that moment but the desire to pass that filthy bus.

A knot of women by the roadside signalled him to stop, and he slowed down. I closed up behind, my eyes on the strip to the left of him, my hands slippery on the wheel.

He stopped in the centre of the road. There was no possible space to pass. I stopped behind him and waited; then, as he drew away from me again and I let in the clutch, I stalled the engine. My hand shook on the ignition. The engine wouldn't start.

At the edge of my vision I caught sight of a face at the rear window of the withdrawing bus, a dark face split in a wide grin. As I started the car and followed, I saw the youth turn as if to nudge someone on the back seat beside him. Another face turned to stare and grin. And another.

Then, close behind me—so close that it nearly sent me into the ditch with fright—I heard a horn.

As I swerved automatically to the right, a jeep, driven fast on its wrong side, roared up from behind, overtook me rather too wide, with the nearside wheels churning dust, and charged straight,

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at the same headlong pace, for the rear of the bus, with its horn still blasting like a siren.

I caught a glimpse of a girl driving: a young, dark face, with lashes drooping over her eyes, and a bored, sulky mouth. She was lounging back in her seat, handling the jeep with casual, almost insolent, expertise. And, woman driver or no, the bus made way for her, whipping smartly over to the right and staying there respectfully while she tore by.

I didn't consciously decide to follow her; in fact, I'm not sure yet whether I trod on the accelerator deliberately, or whether I was feeling for the brake, but something hit me in the small of the back, and the big black car shot forward, missed the bus by inches, and stormed past in the wake of the jeep, with two wheels on the crown of the road and the other two churning up enough dust to have guided the children of Israel straight into Thebes. Where the bus had its offside wheels I neither knew nor cared. I didn't even look in the mirror.

I swept into Thebes and dived smartly down the wrong side of the dual carriageway which is the road through to Levadia and Delphi. The hand of Hermes, god of wayfarers, was over me still. There was a horse-fair at Levadia which, with its accompanying trappings of fiesta, jammed the streets; but after that I met nothing except slow little caravans of country people, and once a train of gipsies—real Egyptians—on the move with mules and ponies covered in bright blankets.

The road reared and twisted between great ribs of brown hill that thrust the landscape up into folded ranges.

Bigger and bigger grew the circling hills, barer the land, drawn in with great sweeps of colour that ran from red to ochre, from ochre to burnt umber to lion-tawny with, above all, the burning, the limitless, the lovely light. And beyond all, at length, a grey ghost of a mountain-massif; not purple, not faintly blue with distance like the mountains of a softer country, but spectre-white, magnificent, a lion silvered. Parnassus, home of the ghosts of the old gods.

I stopped only once to rest, some way beyond Levadia. The road, which wound high along the hillside, was in shadow, and the air at that height was cool. There was no sound, no breath, not even the shadow of a hanging hawk. Only the bare lion-coloured hills, and the illimitable, merciless light.

As I started the engine again I reflected that the god of wayfarers, who had done very well by me so far, had only some twenty miles' more duty to do, and then he could abandon me to my fate.

In fact, he abandoned me just ten kilometres short of Delphi, in the middle of the village of Arachova.

The village is perched on a precipitous hillside, and the houses are built in tiers, one up behind the other, the floor of one level with the roof of the next. The whole village looks as if it is just about to slide into the depths of the valley below. The walls are white and the roofs are rose-red, and over every wall hang flowering

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Coming Attractions in next month's ARGOSY

MICHAEL GILBERT

A holiday party at an Italian villa; hot blood; sudden death; but who would murder a romantic poet ?

GEORGE LANGELAAN

Author of that spine-chiller, The Fly, *brings a haunting story of a transatlantic flight*

ROBERT SHECKLEY

Don't let your wife star-gaze with an astrologer is the motto of his gay new story, dry as a salted peanut

MARY STEWART

Danger thickens for Camilla and Simon in her tense adventure of modern Greece

There's something for Everyone in

ARGOSY

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plants, and vines rich with grapes, and great dollops of wool dyed the colours of amber and hyacinth and blood.

Along the short main street are places selling rugs which hang out in the sunlight, brilliant against the blinding white walls. The street itself has some corners, and is about eight feet wide. On one of these corners I ran into a lorry.

Not quite literally. I managed to stop with my bonnet about nine inches away from his, and there I stayed, paralysed, unable even to think. The two vehicles stood headlamp to headlamp, like a pair of cats staring one another out, one of them preserving a mysterious silence. I had, of course, stalled the engine.

It became apparent all too soon that it was I, and not the lorry-driver, who would have to back. The whole village—the male portion of it—turned out to tell me so, with gestures. They were charming and delightful and terribly helpful. They obviously couldn't understand why anyone who was in charge of such a car shouldn't be able to reverse it.

Eventually I reversed it into somebody's shop doorway.

The whole village helped to pick up the trestle table, re-hang the rugs, and assure me that it didn't matter a scrap.

I straightened up the car and reversed again, stampeding a donkey. The whole village assured me that the donkey wasn't hurt, and that it would stop in a kilometre or so and come home.

I straightened up the car. This time I churned out a reasonably straight course for ten yards while the village held its breath. Then came a bend in the road. I stopped.

I definitely was not prepared to chance reversing over the two-foot parapet into somebody's garden twenty feet down the hillside. I sat there breathing hard, smiling ferociously back at the villagers, and wishing I had never been born and that Simon hadn't either. My bolt was shot.

I had stopped in a patch of sunlight, and the glare from the white walls was blinding. The men crowded closer, grinning delightedly and making gallant and—no doubt fortunately—incomprehensible remarks. The lorry-driver hung out of his cab with the air of a man prepared to spend the whole afternoon enjoying the show.

In desperation, I leaned over the door of the car and addressed the most forward of my helpers, a stout, florid-looking man with small twinkling eyes. He spoke a fluent, if decidedly odd, mixture of French and English.

"Monsieur," I said, "I do not think I can manage this. You see, it's not my car; it belongs to a Monsieur Simon, of Delphi, who requires it urgently for business. I—I'm not very used to it yet, and since it's not mine I don't like to take risks . . . I wonder, could you or one of these gentlemen back it for me? Or perhaps the driver of the lorry would help, if you would ask him? You see, it's not my car . . ."

Some rag of pride led me to insist on this, until I saw he wasn't listening. The smile had gone from the cheerful, sweating face. He said, "Who did you say the car was for?"

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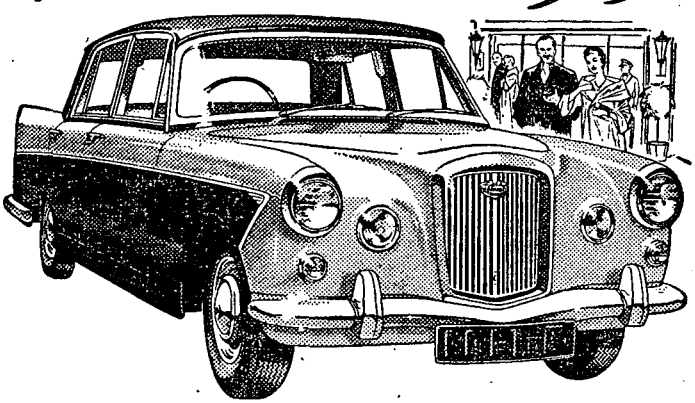

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"A Monsieur Simon, of Delphi. He has hired it from Athens, urgently." I regarded him hopefully. "Do you know him?"

"No," he said, and shook his head. But he spoke a little too quickly, and as he spoke his eyes flickered away from mine.

The man at his elbow looked at me sharply, and then asked a question in rapid Greek, where I thought I caught the word "Simon." My friend nodded once, with that swift flicker of a sidelong look back at me, and said something under his breath. The men near him stared and muttered, and I thought I saw a new kind of curiosity, furtive and perhaps even avid, replacing the naïve amusement of a moment ago.

Before I could decide whether to pursue the inquiry or not, I realised that the men who had been crowding most closely round the car were moving away, unobtrusively yet swiftly, bunching as sheep bunch at the approach of the dog. One and all, they were looking in the same direction.

The stout man's voice said softly, "He will help you."

I turned my head and looked where they all were looking.

A man was coming slowly down a steep, stepped alley that led uphill between the houses on my right. He was about thirty years old, dark-haired, and tanned like all the others in the group near the car, but his clothes, no less than his air and bearing, made him look unmistakably English.

He was not tall—an inch or two under six feet, perhaps—but he was broad in the shoulder, and held himself well with a sort of easy, well-knit movement that spoke of training and perfect physical fitness. I thought him good-looking: a thinnish sun-browned face, black brows, straight nose, and a hard mouth; but just at the moment it was obvious that whatever thoughts held him in that slightly frowning abstraction, he didn't intend them to be disturbed.

A child scampered up the steps and pushed by him, apparently unnoticed. A couple of hens flapped across under his feet without making him pause. A hanging plant splashed petals in a scarlet shower over the white sleeve of his shirt, but he made no move to brush them away. When he reached the foot of the alley-way he paused. He seemed to come abruptly out of his preoccupation and stood there, hands thrust into the pockets of his flannels, surveying the scene in the street. His eyes went straight to the group of men.

I saw the slight frown disappear, and the brown face became a mask, remote, cold, reflecting oddly the wariness I had seen in the villagers. Then he looked straight at me; and it was with something of a shock that I met his eyes. They weren't dark, as I expected. They were grey, very clear and light, and violently alive.

He came down the last step and crossed to the door of the car. The group melted away from us.

He looked down at me. "You seem to be in trouble. Is there anything I can do?"

"I'd be terribly grateful if you *could* help me," I said. "I—I've been trying to back the car."

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"I see." I thought I heard amusement behind the pleasant voice, but his face still expressed nothing.

I said bleakly, "I was trying to get it to go *there*." "There" was a space beyond the curve of the road which, about fifty yards back, looked as remote as the moon.

"And she won't go?"

"No," I said shortly.

"Is there something wrong with her?"

"Just," I said bitterly, "that I can't drive."

"Oh." It was amusement.

I said quickly, "It's not my car."

The lorry-driver leaned out of his cabin and shouted something in Greek, and the Englishman laughed. The laugh transformed his face. The mask of rather careful indifference broke up, and he looked all at once younger and quite approachable, even attractive. He shouted something back in what sounded to me like excellent Greek. At any rate the lorry-man understood, because he nodded and withdrew into his cab, and I heard the lorry's engine begin to roar.

The newcomer laid a hand on the door.

"If you'll allow me, perhaps I can persuade her to go."

"I shouldn't be surprised," I said bitterly, as I moved over. "I was told this was a man's country. It's true. Go ahead."

He got into the car. I found myself hoping that he would do even a single one of the damned silly things I'd been doing all day, but he didn't. To my fury the car moved quietly backwards, slid into the cobbled space beyond the corner, paused two inches away from a house wall, and waited politely for the lorry to pass.

It approached with an appalling noise and a cloud of black smoke. As it drew level, its driver, leaning out of his cab, yelled something at my companion and sent a grinning, black-eyed salutation to me that somehow, without a word being intelligible, made me understand that, though incompetent, I was female and therefore delightful, and that was just how it should be.

The lorry roared on its way. I saw its driver glance back and lift a hand to the men who still stood in a little group near the café door. One or two of them responded, but most were still watching, not the car, but my companion.

I glanced at him. I knew then that I was right. He was aware of it, too. His eyes, narrowed against the sun, showed none of that vivid aliveness that I had surprised in them. He sent the group a look, slow, appraising, utterly without expression. I thought he hesitated. A hand went to the car door, then it dropped back on to the wheel, and he turned to me in inquiry.

I answered his look before he spoke. "As long as I get this car to Delphi in one piece, my self-respect can be salvaged later. Believe me, I'm terribly grateful. I should love you to drive through the village for me."

He smiled. "You must be tired, and it's dreadfully hot. Have you come far?"

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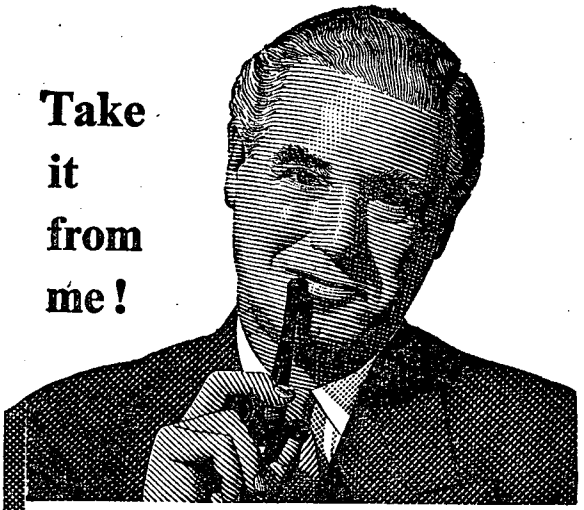

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"From Athens." His brows shot up, but he said nothing. The car was moving with the minimum of noise and fuss through the narrow street. The little group of men had disappeared, melting chin-on-shoulder into the café as the car approached them.

I said defiantly, "Yes, all the way. And not a scratch."

"Congratulations! And here we are. Clear of the houses, and all set for Delphi. You did say Delphi?"

"I did." I regarded him thoughtfully. "I suppose you wouldn't by any chance be going that way yourself?"

"As it happens, yes."

"Would you . . .?" I hesitated, then took the plunge. "Would you like a lift? In a manner of speaking, that is?"

"I should be delighted. And if the manner of speaking means will I drive—with pleasure, ma'am."

"That's wonderful." I relaxed with a little sigh. The car purred round the last corner and gathered speed up a long curling hill. "I've really quite enjoyed myself, but you know I've missed half the scenery."

"Never mind. You brought some of it with you."

"What d'you mean?"

He said coolly, "The feathers on the bonnet. Very original they look, and quite striking."

My hand flew to my mouth. "*Feathers?* Honestly?"

"Indeed, yes. Lots of them."

I said guiltily, "That must be the hen just outside Levadia. At least, it was a cockerel. White ones?"

"Yes."

"I didn't kill him; really I didn't. I saw him come out the other side and dash away. It *is* only feathers, truly." He laughed. He, too, seemed in some indefinable way to have relaxed.

"No hen'll look at that chap till he's grown a new tail," he said cheerfully, "and you don't have to make excuses to me. It wasn't my cockerel."

"No," I said, "but I've a feeling this is your—" I stopped.

"This is what?"

"Oh, nothing. Merciful heavens, what a view!"

We were running along a high, white road that hugged the side of Parnassus. Below us the steep hillside fell away to the valley of the Pleistos, the river that winds down between Parnassus' great flanks and the rounded ridges of Mount Cirphis, towards the plain of Chrissa and the sea.

All along its dry white course, filling the valley-bottom with the tumbling whispering green-silver of water, flowed the olive-woods; themselves a river, a green-and-silver flood of plumy branches as soft as sea-spray, over which the ever-present breezes slid, not as they do over corn, in flying shadows, but in whitening breaths, little gasps that lift and toss the olive-crests for all the world like breaking spray. Long pale ripples followed one another down the valley. Where, at the valley's end, Parnassus thrust a sudden buttress of gaunt rock into the flood, the sea of grey trees seemed

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to break round it, flowing on, and flooding out to fill the plain.

I said after a while, "Are you staying in Delphi?"

"Yes. I've been there a few days. Have you come for long?"

I laughed. "Till the money gives out. I only hope there'll be a room for me somewhere."

"Delphi's fairly full just now. Perhaps we can persuade a hotel to throw someone out for you." A pause. "Hadn't we better introduce ourselves? My name's Lester."

"I'm Camilla Haven," I said slowly, watching him, "but I've got a sort of alias today. You might say I'm—*Simon's girl.*"

The dark brows shot up. One of those quick, light, electrifying glances, then he was watching the road again. He said evenly, "How very gratifying. But why? Because I rescued you in Arachova?"

I felt the blood coming into my cheeks. I hadn't thought of that one. I said quickly, "No. I only meant I'd been deputising for her—the other girl—since Athens. With the car."

"The car?" he said blankly.

"Yes." I swallowed and shot a glance at him. This was going to sound even sillier than I had imagined. "This is your car. The one from Athens."

I could see nothing in his glance this time except puzzlement.

"I'm afraid I don't follow. My car? From Athens? And what other girl? Forgive me, but—just what are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have jumped it on you like that. The important thing is that this is the car you're expecting. The girl you sent to hire it didn't turn up to claim it, and I was handed the key by mistake, so—well, I brought it up here for you. I—I hope it's all right. It was the most marvellous luck to find you—"

"You say someone hired this car in Athens, and you were given the key and drove it up here?"

"Yes." This time it was my voice that sounded flat and blank. "It wasn't—it wasn't you?"

"Decidedly not. I know nothing about a hired car from Athens or anywhere else."

"But back there in Arachova—" I hesitated, feeling more than ever confused and foolish.

"Yes?" The car slowed, dipped on to a little bridge set at an angle over a narrow gorge, then accelerated up the curling hill beyond. His tone was casual, but somehow I got the impression of sharp interest. "Just what made you think I ought to know about it?"

I said quickly, "You *are* called Simon, aren't you?"

"That is my name. They told you in Arachova? Those men?"

"No. That is, yes, in a way. But never mind that now. You did say you were staying in Delphi?"

"Yes."

I said flatly, stupidly, "Then it *must* be you! It must be!"

"I do assure you it isn't." The quick, appraising glance he gave me must have shown him the distress in my face, because he smiled

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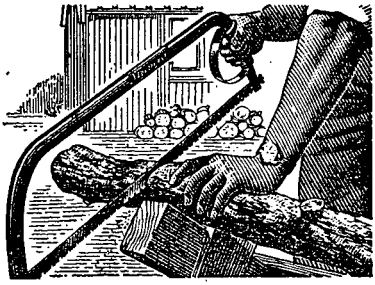

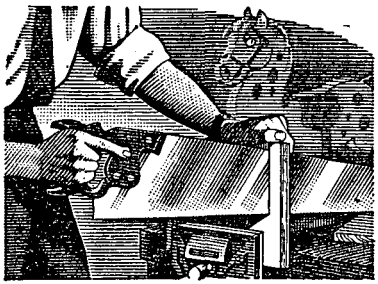

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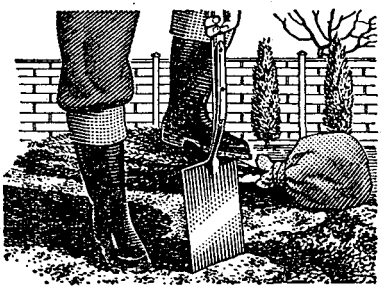

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then, and said gently, " Surely the garage also gave you the hirer's name and address? "

I said in a very small voice, " That's just it. I never knew it."

He looked startled, and then, I thought, amused. " I see. You never knew it. Except, I take it, that his name was Simon? "

" Yes. I told you I'd done something silly . . ." I looked away from him across the blue depths of the valley, and spoke my thoughts with artless and quite unguarded emphasis, " Oh dear, and it would have been so wonderful if it had been you! "

The words were hardly out before I realised what they sounded like. For the second time in a few minutes I felt the heat wash scarlet into my cheeks. I opened my lips to say something, anything; but before I could speak, he said pleasantly, " I wish it had been. But look, don't worry so about it. Perhaps, if you'll let me, I can help you. Would you care to tell me just what's happened? "

I told him. I kept to a bare recital of the facts.

He made no comment on my silly story. He merely said, " In your place I'd have done exactly the same."

" *Would* you? "

He laughed. " Of course. What right-minded person could resist a challenge like that? "

" Honestly? "

" Honestly."

I let out a long breath. " You've no idea how much better you've made me feel. But at least you'd have managed the adventure properly. You'd never have got stuck in Arachova! "

" Ah, yes," he said, " Arachova." The shutters were up once more. He added, half under his breath, " Simon, of Delphi."

I said quickly, " It does seem odd, doesn't it? That there should be two? I told you that the man from Chrissa didn't know anyone of that name hereabouts. Delphi's small, isn't it? "

" Lord, yes."

" Then he'd know, wouldn't he? That was why I was so sure it must be you."

He didn't answer. There was that look again, smooth, blank: the unclimbable wall with spikes at the top.

I gave him a doubtful glance he didn't see, and said tentatively, " Could there have been some kind of mistake? I mean, suppose it *is* you; suppose someone got a message wrong, and the whole thing is just a mix-up? Do you know anyone in Athens, perhaps, who might have—? "

" No." The syllable was definite to the point of curtness. " It's quite impossible. I've had no communication with Athens during the last week at all. And you say it was a girl who did the hiring. I've no idea who that could be." A pause; then he added in a different voice, as if he felt he had been too abrupt, " We'll soon get it straightened out, and then you can settle down to enjoy Delphi.

" You can't see the village from here, but the ruins are this

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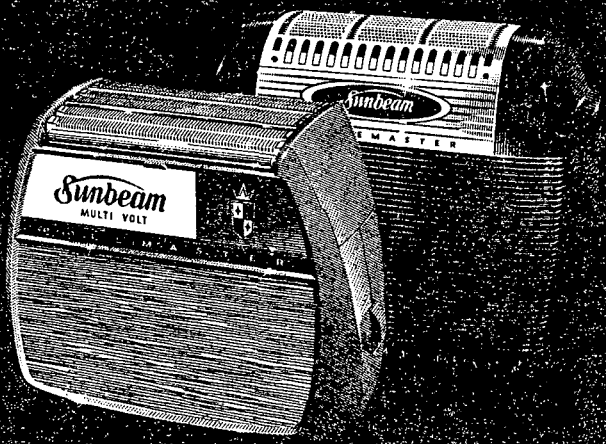

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side of the bluff, in the curve of the mountain under those high cliffs. There—that's Apollo's temple, below the cliffs they call the Shining Ones. You see?"

I saw. Ahead of us the mountain thrust that great buttress out into the valley, the river of olive trees swirling round it as the water swirls round the prow of a ship, to spread out beyond into a great flat lake that filled the plain. High up, in the angle where the bluff joined the mountain, I saw it, Apollo's temple, six columns of apricot stone, glowing against the climbing darkness of the trees behind. Above them soared the sunburnt cliffs; below was a tumble, as yet unrecognisable, of what must be monument and treasury and shrine.

From where we were the pillars seemed hardly real; not stone that had ever felt hand or chisel, but insubstantial, the music-built columns of legend: Olympian building, left floating—warm from the god's hand—between sky and earth. Above, the indescribable sky of Hellas; below, the silver tide of the olives everlastingly rippling down to the sea. No house, no man, no beast. As it was in the beginning . . .

I realised then that Simon Lester had stopped the car. We must have stood there for some minutes, at the edge of the road, in the shadow of a stone-pine. He didn't speak, and neither did I.

But I noticed that it wasn't Apollo's shining columns that held him. His gaze was on something nearer at hand, away up the side of Parnassus above the road. I followed his look, but could see nothing: only the bare rock shifting and flowing upwards with the liquid shimmer of the heat.

I said, "And the village is just the other side of the bluff?"

"Yes. The road runs through those trees below the ruins and then round that shoulder into Delphi."

He turned the subject abruptly, "I'm still rather curious to know how you knew my name. I understand it was from those men in Arachova. Was . . . something said?"

"Not really. I told them the car was for someone called Simon, at Delphi. I thought they looked as if that meant something. They all turned and stared at you. It was just the way they looked, somehow. Then when you told me you came from Delphi, I guessed you might be Simon—my Simon. They—" I hesitated—"they seemed to assume you were the right one, too."

"Ah, well," he said smoothly, "the sooner we get to Delphi and find your man, the better, don't you think?"

"I do indeed." I laughed. "After all this, we'll probably find him watching beside the road and dancing with impatience; that is, if the little man was right and it really is a matter—" I stopped. Until I repeated the words, half automatically, I'd forgotten them myself.

"It is what?"

I said slowly, looking at him, "A matter of life and death."

He said, "Is that all he told you?"

"Yes. But he repeated it."

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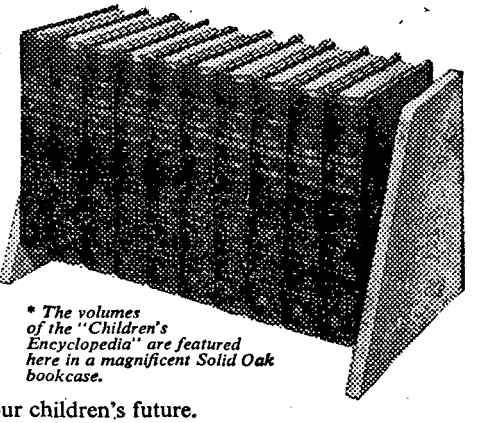

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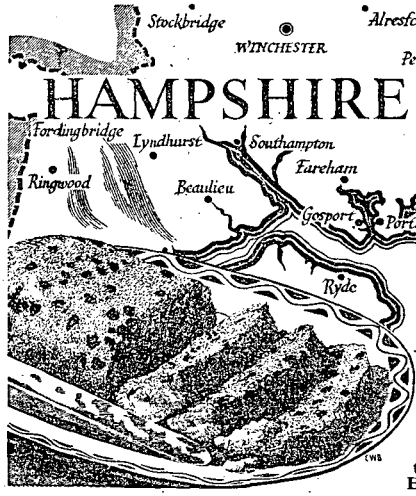

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"And you took the car, and the risks with it, because of some feeling of urgency about the affair?"

"That makes it sound more definite than it was, and there were —other reasons. But, yes. Yes." The car roared up a long incline, swept round and down a curling hill. I leaned back against the hot leather and said, not looking at him, "If the little man was right, it's just as well you're not Simon, isn't it?"

He said, quite without expression, "Just as well. And here we are. What comes first? Simon, or the hotel?"

"Both. I imagine the hotel people are as likely to know of him as anyone, and at least I expect they speak English. My six words of Greek won't get me very far alone."

"On the other hand," said Simon gravely, "they might get you a good deal farther than you intended."

The village consists of only two or three rows of flat-topped houses, washed ochre and pink and dazzling white, set in their tiers along the steep side of the hill.

Outside the hotel, on the edge of the road which was used as a terrace, two big plane trees made a deep island of shade for some wooden tables and chairs. Simon Lester had parked the car just beyond these, and was waiting there. When I had completed the formalities of booking I went out to speak to him. "It's all right. They can take me for tonight; and just at the moment that's all I care about." I held out my hand. "I have to thank you very much, Mr. Lester. I don't quite know where I'd have been without your help. I've a feeling it might have been somewhere at the bottom of the valley, with the eagles of Zeus picking my bones!"

"It was a pleasure." He was looking down at me, measuringly. "And now what are you planning to do? Rest and have some tea first, or is that—" a gesture indicated the car—"worrying you too much?"

I said uncertainly, "It is, rather."

"Look," he said, "won't you please leave this to me, at any rate for the time being? Why don't you go and lie down, and have tea brought to your room—they make excellent tea here, by the way—while I make a few inquiries for you?"

"It's absurd that you should be landed with my difficulties," I said, a little confusedly, and conscious only of a strong desire that he should, in fact, be landed with them all. I finished feebly, "I couldn't let you."

"Why not? It would be too cruel if you turned on me now and told me to mind my own business. After all, it's partly my affair too, since my alter ego has managed to involve me. I really would be very grateful if you'd let me help. Have a rest and some tea, now, while I do the detecting for you in my fluent, but no doubt peculiar Greek." He glanced at his wrist. "Shall we say an hour? I'll report back at five-thirty. Right?"

"Right." I looked at him a little helplessly. "But if you do find him, and he's angry—"

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"Well?"

"I don't want you made responsible."

"You'd be surprised," he said cryptically, "how responsible I feel already. See you later." With a quick wave of the hand he was gone down the steps to the lower road.

My room overlooked the valley, and had a long window with a balcony. The shutters were closed against the sun.

I had my tea—Simon Lester had been right about its excellence—propped against pillows, and with my feet up on the bed.

Before I knew it was even near, sleep had overtaken me . . .

I woke to a feeling of freshness. But the light still drove white against the shutters, and when I opened them a crack I saw that the sun blazed, deeper now and lower, but at full power.

I glanced down at the terrace below the balcony. He was there, under one of the plane trees, smoking. He sat relaxed, looking at nothing, completely at ease. The car was standing where he had parked it before. If—as appeared to be the case—he had not located another Simon to deliver it to, the fact didn't appear to worry him unduly.

I reflected, as I looked down at him thoughtfully, that it would probably take a good deal to worry Simon Lester.

In this, it seemed, I had done him less than justice.

I found him, hands thrust deep in trouser pockets, in earnest contemplation of the car together with a Greek on whose bright blue shirt was pinned the insignia of a guide.

Simon looked up and smiled at me. "Rested?"

"Perfectly, thank you. And the tea *was* good."

"I'm glad to hear it. Perhaps you're strong enough, then, to bear the blow?" He jerked his head towards the car.

"I thought as much. You've not found him?"

"Not a sign. I've been to the other hotels, but there's no visitor of that name. Then I went along to the Museum to meet George here. He doesn't know anyone named Simon in Delphi."

The Greek said, "Only yourself, Kyrie Lester."

"Only myself," agreed Simon.

I said, rather helplessly, "What shall we do?"

"Kyrie Lester," said the Greek, watching him curiously, "could it not be, perhaps, that there *is* no other Simon? And that it is not a mistake? That someone is using your name?"

"Taking my name in vain?" Simon laughed, but I knew that this had already occurred to him.

George said, regretfully, "I do not remember anyone in Arachova, either."

"In any case, I can find out. I'm going back there tonight," Simon stated. "We have a car." He grinned as he caught my eye. He nodded to George, said something in Greek, then pulled open the car door for me.

I said doubtfully, "Ought we to?"

"Why not? This is a quite legitimate attempt at delivery. It'll be dark in an hour."

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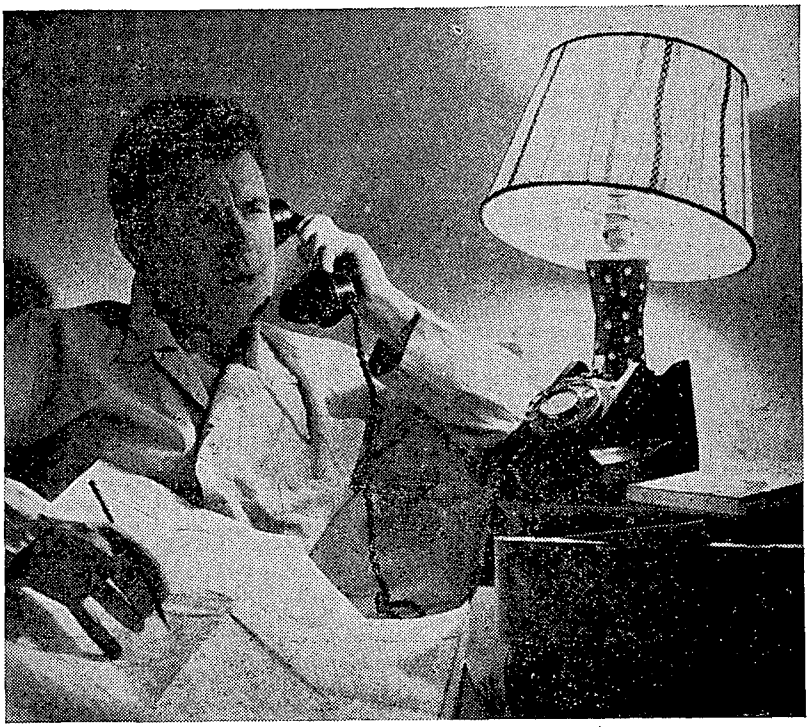

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"You'll drive, won't you, Mr. Lester?"

"You bet I will. You haven't seen the Itea road. And please call me Simon. It's more euphonious than Mr. Lester, and besides—" his grin, as he slid into his seat beside me, was malicious—"it'll give you an illusion of comfort."

I didn't answer that one, except with a look, but as we drove off I said suddenly, and almost to my own surprise, "I'm beginning to feel frightened."

The glance he gave me held surprise but, oddly enough, no amusement. "That's a strong word."

"I suppose so. I'm the world's most complete coward," I acknowledged. "But you do see, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

The car crept carefully through Delphi's narrow upper street, topped the rise opposite the presbytery, and then dived down to meet the lower road out of the village.

I said casually, "Are you just holidaying here in Delphi?"

"In a way. I'm a schoolmaster. I have a house at Wintringham. Classics is my subject."

"Then, of course, you're interested in the classical sites. Like me."

"Don't tell me you're a colleague? Classics?"

"Yes. In a girls' school that means Latin to my sorrow and shame."

"You don't know Ancient Greek?"

"A very little."

The car wheeled yet again round a hairpin, and plunged on down the great shoulder of Parnassus that sticks out into the Chrissa Plain. Below us was a village, and below it again the flood of olives, flowing mile-wide now to the sea.

Simon said cheerfully, "The buses all have icons stuck up in front of the driver, and with a little red light in front, run off the battery. On this road the icon swings madly from side to side at the bends and everybody crosses themselves."

I laughed. "Including the driver?"

"This is true. Yes, including the driver. I have a feeling that sometimes," said Simon, "he also shuts his eyes." He pulled the big car round an even sharper bend, missed an upcoming lorry by centimetres, and added, "You can open yours now. This is Chrissa."

I felt the colour come into my cheeks. "I'm sorry. I must be losing my nerve."

"You're still tired, that's all. We'll have something to drink in Itea before we seek out this Simonides."

"No, please," I protested, almost too quickly.

He eyed me. "You really are scared, aren't you?"

"I—yes, I am."

"I shouldn't worry; I really shouldn't. It can't matter, or it'd have been settled long before this. Whatever we get into, I'll talk you out of it, so sit back and relax."

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I was glad enough, when we got to Itea, to leave everything to him.

Simon stopped the car under the trees and led me to a rickety iron table which seemed to have fewer attendant wasps than the others. I would have liked tea again, but felt so ashamed of this insular craving that I asked for fresh lemonade, and got it, delicious and cold and tangy with the real fruit, and with it a pasta, frantically oversweet with honey and chopped nuts. It was wonderful.

The wasps loved it, too. When we had finished it I defiantly asked for another, and stayed to eat it while Simon went off to look for the baker's shop of Simonides.

Somehow I didn't think Giannakis Simonides was our man. "Monsieur Simon, at Delphi." And there was only one Monsieur Simon at Delphi. There was that queer reserve, too, in Simon's manner; there was Arachova; and the way he had shelved my question as to what he was doing in Delphi. The thing had ceased to be a slightly awkward puzzle. It was fast becoming a mystery, with Simon Lester at its centre. And Simon's girl . . .

I finished my cake now and got up. Simon had paid the waiter before he had left me.

I could see him standing in a doorway some distance up the street. The place was apparently a restaurant, for outside it stood the big charcoal stove, and over this a whole lamb revolved slowly on the spit, which was being turned by a stout woman in a blue apron. Simon appeared to be questioning her; she was nodding vigorously, and then, with a wave of her free hand, seemed to be directing him farther up the street.

He looked back, saw me standing under the pepper trees, and raised a hand in salute. Then he made a vague gesture towards the other end of the street, and set off that way.

Taking his gesture to mean that he didn't expect me to follow him, I turned in the opposite direction and walked quickly along the harbour's edge. On my right the sea paled towards sunset, and across the opal shimmer of the bay came a fishing boat, turquoise and white, with her prow raked in a proud, pure curve above its liquid image. Under a sail of that same scarlet had the worshippers come into harbour when the god was still at Delphi.

I left the sea's edge and walked rapidly across the street. I wanted to get behind the ugly row of houses, back into the old olive woods, where I could look straight up towards the Pleistos valley with nothing but immemorial rock and tree and sky between me and the shrine.

Behind the main street were a few sorry alleys of concrete. Soon the concrete came to an end, and I found myself walking through soft earth in the deeper twilight of the trees. I hurried on towards a space ahead where stronger light promised a clearing. I was lucky. There was a slight rise in the ground, and to the north of it the great olives thinned. From the top of the little ridge, across the ruffling crests of the trees, I could see the old Pilgrim's Way, unscarred by my own century. I stood for a few minutes, gazing up towards the shrine in the now rapidly fading light.

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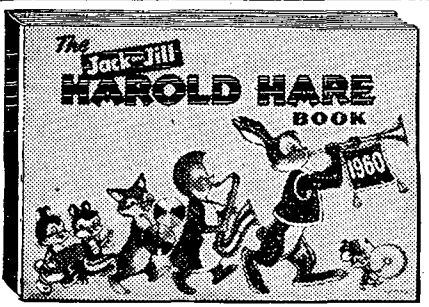

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The temple columns were invisible behind the curve of the Chrissa bluff, but there was the black cleft of Castalia, and above it the great cliffs whose names are Flamboyant and Roseate; the Shining Ones. The dying sun ran up the Flamboyant cliff like fire.

This was, I thought, the way to come to Delphi. Not straight up into the ruins in the wake of a guide, but to land from a small boat in a bay of pearl, and see it as the pilgrims would have seen it, flaming in the distance like a beacon, the journey's end.

It was deep twilight now, the swift-falling Aegean dusk. I turned to go back to the village.

Instead of returning the way I had come, I took what I judged to be the direction of the car and, plunging down from the ridge into the depths of the olive wood I set off quickly through the twisted and shadowy trunks.

I had gone perhaps a hundred yards before the trees began to thin. Some way off to my left I saw the lights of the first house, an outpost of the village, and was hurrying towards it through the soft dusk when a sudden flash of light quite near me and to my right brought me up short, startled. I stood very still by the trunk of an enormous olive.

There was a house set by itself deep in the grove, the usual two-windowed box of a place with its woodpile and its lean-to shed. The flash showed me a man bending over a motor vehicle of some sort which was parked close to the side of the house. It looked like a jeep. As I watched he jerked the bonnet open, shone the light into the engine, and leaned over it.

I saw his face highlighted in the queerly refracted beam, a very Greek face, dark, with hair crisping down the wide cheekbones in the manner of the heroes, and a roundish head covered with close curls like a statue's.

Then somebody in the cottage must have kindled the lamp, for a soft oblong of light slanted out of one of the windows, showing the dusty clutter outside—a woodman's block with the axe still sunk in it and gleaming as the light caught it, a couple of old petrol cans, and a chipped enamel bowl for the hens' food. My causeless fear vanished, and I turned quickly to go.

The man by the jeep must have seen the movement of my skirt in the darkness, because he looked up. I caught a glimpse of his face before the torch went out. He was smiling. I turned and hurried away. As I went, I thought the torch-beam flicked out to touch me momentarily, but the Greek made no move to follow.

Simon was sitting in the car, smoking. He got out when he saw me and came round to open my door. He answered my look with a shake of the head.

"No go. I've asked all the questions I could, and it's a dead end." He got into the driver's seat and started the engine. "I really think we'll have to call it a day—go back to Delphi and have dinner, and leave it to sort itself out in its own good time."

"But will it?"

He turned the car and started back towards Delphi. "I think so."

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I didn't argue. I said simply, "Then we'll leave it. As you wish."

I saw him glance at me sideways, but he made no comment. The lights of the village were behind us, and we gathered speed up the narrow road between the olives. He dropped something into my lap, a leafy twig that smelt delicious when my fingers touched it. "What is it?"

"Basil. The herb of kings."

I brushed it to and fro across my lips. The smell was sweet and minty, pungent above the smell of dust.

"You found the ridge?"

"Do you know it, then? You've been there before?"

"I was down there yesterday."

"In Itea?"

"Yes." The road was climbing now. After a short silence he said, with no perceptible change of expression, "You know, I really don't know any more about it than you do."

The basil leaves were cool and still against my mouth. At length I said, "I'm sorry. Did I make it so obvious? But what was I to think?"

"Probably just what you did think. The thing's slightly crazy anyway, and I doubt if it'll prove to matter at all." I saw him smile. "Thank you for not pretending you didn't know what I meant."

"But I did. I'd been thinking about very little else myself."

"I know that. But nine women out of ten would have said 'What d'you mean?' and there we'd have been, submerged in a lovely welter of personalities and explanations."

"There wasn't any need of either."

"Will you have dinner with me tonight as reparation for suspecting—whatever you did suspect me of?" We were climbing through the twisting street of Chrissa, and as we passed a lighted shop he glanced at his wrist. "Could you bear to dine in half an hour's time—say at half past seven?"

"Whenever it suits you. But isn't that fearfully early for Greece?"

"Reasonably. I—well, I've things to do, and I want to get them done tonight."

"I see. Well, it won't be too early for me. I only had a snack for lunch, and I was too frightened to enjoy it. So, thank you. I'd like that. At the Apollon? You're not staying there yourself?"

"No. When I came here the place was full, so I got permission to sleep in the studio up the hill. It is let out to visiting artists and bona fide students. I suppose I'm up there under slightly false pretences. There's only one other tenant at present, an English boy who's a genuine artist—and good, too, though he won't let you say so."

"But surely you've a perfectly good claim on the studio, too?" I said. "After all, you count as a student. As a classicist you've a bona fide claim on any concession."

He sent me a sideways look that I couldn't read in the darkness.

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He said rather shortly, "I'm not here to pursue my classical studies."

"Oh." It sounded lame, and I hoped it hadn't sounded like a question.

Simon said suddenly, into the darkness straight ahead, "My brother Michael was here during the war."

Chrissa was below us now. Far down to our left as we climbed along the face of the bluff the lights of Itea were strung like beads under the thin moon.

He said, still in that expressionless way, "He was in the Peloponnese for some time, as B.L.O.—that's British Liaison Officer—between our chaps and the Andartes, the Greek guerrillas under Zervas. Later he moved over into the Pindus region with ELAS, the main resistance group. He was in this part of the country in 1944. He stayed with some people in Arachova: a shepherd called Stephanos and his son Nikolaos. Nikolaos is dead, but Stephanos still lives in Arachova. I went over to try to see him today, but he's away in Levadia, and not expected back till this evening—so the woman of his house told me."

"The woman of his house?"

He laughed. "His wife. You'll find everyone has to belong, hereabouts. Every man belongs to a place, and I'm afraid that every woman belongs to a man."

"I believe you," I said, without rancour. "I suppose it gives meaning to her life, poor thing?"

"But of course. Anyway, I'm going down to Arachova again tonight to see Stephanos."

"I see. Then this is a—a sort of pilgrimage for you? A genuine pilgrimage to Delphi?"

"You could call it that. I've come to appease his shade."

I caught my breath. "Oh. How stupid of me. I'm sorry. I didn't realise."

"That he died? Yes."

"Here?"

"Yes, in 1944. Somewhere on Parnassus."

Something made me say suddenly, into the dark, "Simon."

"Yes?"

"Why did you say 'appease'?"

A little silence. Then he spoke quite lightly. "I'll tell you about that, if I may. But not just at this moment. Here's Delphi. I'll leave you and the car at your hotel, and I'll meet you on the terrace here in half an hour. Right?"

"Right." The car drew up where it had stood before. He came round and opened my door for me. I got out, and when I would have turned to repeat some words of thanks for his help in my afternoon's quest he shook his head, laughed, raised a hand in farewell, and vanished up the steep lane beside the hotel.

When I came down to dinner, and walked out to the hotel terrace to find a table, I saw Simon below the terrace, making one of

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The Amazing Potentialities of Memory

I LITTLE thought when I arrived at my friend Borg's house that I was about to see something truly extraordinary, and to increase my mental powers ten-fold.

He had asked me to come to Stockholm to lecture to the Swedes about Lister and other British scientists. On the evening of my arrival, after the champagne, our conversation turned naturally to the problems of public speaking and to the great labour imposed on us lecturers by the need to be word perfect in our lectures.

Borg then told me that his power of memory would probably amaze me—and I had known him, while we were studying law together in Paris, to have the most deplorable memory !

So he went to the end of the dining room and asked me to write down a hundred three-figure numbers, calling each one out in a clear voice. When I had filled the edge of an old newspaper with figures, *Borg repeated them to me in the order in which I had written them down and then in reverse order, that is beginning with the last number. He also allowed me to ask him the relative position of different numbers : for example, which was the 24th, the 72nd, and the 38th, and I noticed that he replied to all my questions at once and without effort, as if the figures which I had written on the paper had been also written in his brain.*

I was dumbfounded by such a feat and sought in vain for the trick which enabled him to achieve it. My friend then said : " The thing you have just seen and which seems so remarkable is, in fact, quite simple ; everybody has a memory good enough to do the same, but few indeed can use this wonderful faculty."

He then revealed to me how I could achieve a similar feat of memory, and I at once mastered the secret—without mistakes and without effort—as you too will master it tomorrow.

But I did not stop at these amusing experiments. I applied the principles I had learned in my daily work. I could now remember, with unbelievable facility, the lectures I heard and those which I gave myself, the names of people I met—even if it was only once—as well as their addresses, and a thousand other details which were most useful to me. *Finally, I discovered after a while that not only had my memory improved, but that I had also acquired greater powers of concentration ; a surer judgment—which is by no means surprising since the keenness of our intellect is primarily dependent on the number and variety of the things we remember.*

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L. CONWAY

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a gay and noisy group of Greeks which surrounded a fair boy in the garb of a hiker, and a very small donkey almost hidden under its load of what appeared to be the paraphernalia of an artist—boxes, roughly-wrapped canvases, and a small collapsible easel, as well as the unappetising end of a large black loaf.

Half the youth of Delphi seemed to have rallied to the stranger's welcome, like the wasps to my honey-cake. There was a great deal of loud laughter, and atrocious English. He was reeling with tiredness, but a white grin split the dirty, bearded face as he responded to the welcome. Simon was laughing, too, and pulling the donkey's ears.

Eventually Simon looked up and saw me. He came swiftly up to our table under the dark boughs, where lights swung gently in the warm, evening air. "I'm sorry; have you been waiting? That boy's a young Dutch painter who's been making his way through the mountains with a donkey."

"He certainly got a welcome," I said, laughing. "It looked as if all Delphi had turned out."

"Even the tourist traffic hasn't quite spoilt the Greek philoxenia—the welcome that means literally 'love of a stranger,'" said Simon, "though, goodness knows, Delphi ought to be a bit blasé by now. At least, he'll get the traditional night's lodging free up at the studio."

"I thought he must be your English painter friend."

"Nigel? No. I doubt if a venture like that would ever occur to Nigel. He hasn't the self-confidence."

"You said he was a good painter, though?"

"I think he's good," said Simon, picking up the menu and absently handing it to me. It was in Greek, so I handed it back again. "But he's convinced himself—or some fool has told him—that his own particular style is no good any more. I admit it's not the fashion, but the boy can draw like an angel when he chooses. His line is sure and delicate, and exciting at the same time.

"He's hard at work trying to form a modern style that he thinks will 'take,' but I'm terribly afraid it won't work. Oh, he's clever, and it's arresting enough—but it's not his own. Another pity is that he's been here in Delphi a bit too long, and got tied up with a girl who wasn't very good for him. She's gone, but the melancholy remains." He smiled. "As you see, it's with me, rather. I'm all the company Nigel's had lately, and I've been playing confidant."

"Or housemaster?"

He laughed. "If you like. He's very young in many ways, and habit dies hard. One takes it for granted one is there to help, though I'm not just sure how much anyone can do for an artist at the best of times. I believe the agony is in proportion to the talent...

"Look, what are you going to eat? Why don't you choose something?" He handed me the menu.

I gave it patiently back. "I shall die of hunger in a minute," I told him. "Have you looked at this dashed menu? The only things I recognise are patates, tomates, and melon, and I refuse to

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be a vegetarian in a land which produces those heavenly little chunks of lamb on sticks with mushrooms between."

"I'm sorry," said Simon penitently. "Here they are, see? Souvlaka. Well, so be it." He ordered the meal, then finally cocked an eyebrow at me. "What shall we drink? How's the palate coming on?"

"If that means can I swallow retsina yet," I said, "the answer is yes; though what it has to do with a palate I cannot see." Retsina is a mild wine, strongly flavoured with resin. It comes in beautiful little copper tankards, and smells like turpentine. To acquire a taste for retsina is the right thing to do. "Retsina, certainly," I said firmly.

I thought I saw the faintest shade of irony in Simon's eye.

"The palate is faint yet pursuing and I expect I'll like it soon."

When it came, it was good, as retsina goes—and the dinner along with it was excellent. We had onion soup with grated cheese on top; then the souvlaka, which comes spiced with lemon and herbs and flanked with chips and green beans in oil and a big dish of tomato salad. Then cheese, and halvas, which is a sort of loaf made of grated nuts and honey, and is delicious. And finally the wonderful grapes of Greece, bloomed over like misted agates and cooled with water from the spring above the temple of Apollo.

Simon talked entertainingly through the meal, without once mentioning Michael Lester or his purpose in visiting Delphi; and I forgot the cloud that was still hanging over my day, and only recollected it when a lorry, chugging up past the terrace, slowed down to pass the car parked at the edge of the narrow road.

Simon followed my look. He set down his little cup of Greek coffee, and then looked across the table at me. "Conscience still active?"

"Not so active as it was. There's not so much room. That was a heavenly meal, and thank you very much."

"I wondered—" Simon said thoughtfully, and stopped.

I said just as thoughtfully, "It's a long walk to Arachova. Is that it?"

He grinned. "That's it. Well? It's your car."

I said fervently, "It's not, you know. I never want to touch it again. I—I've renounced it."

"That's a pity, because—with your permission, which I take it I have—I'm going to drive down to Arachova in a few minutes' time, and I was rather hoping you'd come too."

I said, in very real amazement, "Me? But you don't want me!"

"Please," said Simon.

For some reason I felt the colour coming hot into my cheeks.

"I promise not to let anything upset you." He smiled.

"I wasn't worrying about its upsetting me. I was thinking only that—well, you hardly know me, and it *is* a private matter. You said it could be called a pilgrimage, remember?"

He said slowly, "If I said what I really want to say you'd think I was crazy. But let me say this—and it's true—I'd be terribly

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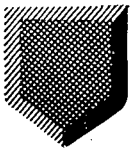

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grateful if you'd give me your company this evening." There was a little pause. Away over the invisible sea the thin moon hung, apricot now among the white scatter of stars. Above us the breeze in the plane trees sounded like rain.

I said, "Of course I'll come."

"Michael was ten years older than I was," said Simon. "There were just the two of us, and our mother died when I was fifteen. My father thought the sun rose and set in Michael—and so did I, I suppose. I remember how dead the house seemed when he was drafted off to the Med., and Father just sat every day with the papers and the radio, trying to learn what he could." A little smile touched his lips. "It wasn't easy. I told you Michael came here with the S.A.S., the Special Air Service, when Germany occupied Greece. He was doing undercover work with the resistance in the mountains for eighteen months before he was killed and, of course, news came very thinly and not always accurately.

"We only got three letters from Michael in all that time. All he told us in the first two was that he was well, and things were going according to plan."

He paused while he negotiated a sharp bend made more hair-raising than ever by the dark.

"We did eventually find out a certain amount about his work in Greece from chaps who'd been with him here in Force 133, and

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had been in touch with him off and on through the fighting. I told you he was a B.L.O. attached to guerrillas. Perhaps I'd better tell you the set-up in Greece after the German invasion—or do you know all about it?"

"Not a great deal. Only that ELAS was the main guerrilla organisation, and was more concerned in feathering its own Commie nest than in fighting Germans."

"So you do know that? You'd be surprised how many people never grasped it, even in 1944 when the Germans got out of Greece and ELAS turned on its own country—tried to stage a Communist coup d'état—and started murdering Greeks with the arms and cash we'd smuggled to them, and which they'd hidden safely away in the mountains till they could use them for the Party."

"But there were other guerrillas who did an honest job, surely?"

"Oh yes. To begin with there were quite a few groups; and it was Michael's job, among other things, to try to bring them together in a more or less coherent plan of campaign. But it broke his heart as it broke the hearts of every B.L.O. in Greece. ELAS set to work and smashed some groups and assimilated others until eventually there was only one other important resistance group, EDES, under a leader called Zervas."

"I remember. You said he was in the Peloponnese."

"That's it. ELAS tried hard to liquidate him, too, of course."

"Attacked Zervas? While he was fighting the Germans?"

"Yes. Zervas fought a double-sided battle, and managed to beat off the Germans, but he still lost some of his valuable supplies to ELAS, who stashed them away, no doubt, against the end of the German war and the day of the New Dawn."

There was a silence, underlined by the humming of the engine. The autumn stars were milky-white and as large as asters. Against their mild radiance the young cypresses stood like spears.

"And that brings me to the reason for my visit to Delphi," said Simon.

I said, "Michael's third letter?"

"You're quick, aren't you? Yes, indeed, Michael's third letter."

He changed gear, and the car slowed and turned carefully on to a narrow bridge set at right angles to the road. He went on in his pleasant, unemotional voice, "It came after we had news of his death. I didn't read it then. I didn't know of the letter's existence till six months ago when Father died, and I, as his executor, had to go through his papers. The letter . . ." He paused, and I felt a curious little thrill go through me.

"The letter didn't say much, but it was—I don't know quite how to describe it—it was excited. Even the writing. I knew Michael pretty well, for all the difference in our ages, and I tell you he was as excited as all-get-out when he wrote that letter. I think it was something he'd found, somewhere on Parnassus."

Again that queer little thrill. The night swooped by, full of stars. On our left the mountain loomed like the lost world of the gods. All of a sudden it didn't seem possible that I was here, and that

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this—this ground where our tyres whispered through the dust—was Parnassus.

"You must understand," he said, "that when I read that letter in the end, I read it against a background of information picked up after the war. We'd found out, my father and I, where and how Michael had been working, and we'd talked to some of the fellows he'd met here. We were told that he'd been sent up into this area in the spring of 1943, and for over a year before he was killed he was working with one of the ELAS bands whose leader was a man called Angelos Dragoumis.

"I couldn't learn very much about this Angelos—that was the name he was generally known by, and I gather that it was desperately inappropriate: only one of the other Force 133 chaps had actually met him, and the few inquiries I've made here in the last day or so have been quietly stone-walled. The Greeks aren't proud of men like Angelos.

"The thing is that this man Angelos seems to have rather modelled himself on the ELAS commander, Ares, and he made himself felt in the country hereabouts just as Ares did."

"You mean he plundered his own side?"

"That and worse. The extra unpleasant touch is that Angelos came from this district himself. Yes, I know. It's hard to take, isn't it? He's dead, anyway—at least, that's the assumption. He vanished across the Yugoslav border when the Communist putsch failed in December 1944.

"Anyway, that was the man Michael was working with and they did get some pretty good results in the military line—but then the Germans arrived here in force, and Angelos' band scattered and went into hiding in the hills. Michael, I gather, was on his own. He evaded capture for some weeks, hiding somewhere up here on Parnassus. Then one day a patrol spotted him. He got away, but one of their bullets hit him—not a bad wound, but enough to disable him, and with no attention it might have proved serious.

"One of his contacts was Stephanos, the shepherd from Arachova we're going to see tonight. Stephanos took Michael in, and he and his wife nursed and hid him and would, I think, have got him out of the country if the Germans hadn't descended on Arachova while Michael was still here."

They had come along this very road. I said, "They found him."

"No. But they'd been told he was here, and so they took Stephanos' son, Nikolaos, out and shot him, because his parents wouldn't give Michael away."

"Simon!"

He said gently, "It was a commonplace. You don't know these people yet. They stood and let their families be murdered in front of them rather than betray an ally who'd eaten their salt."

"The other side of the picture," I said, thinking of ELAS and Angelos.

"As you say. And when you think harshly of ELAS, remember two things. One is that the Greek is born a fighting animal.

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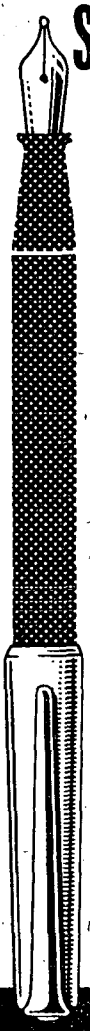

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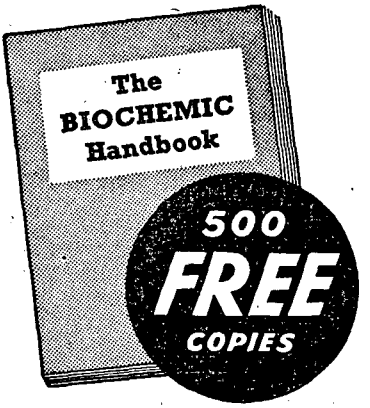

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Doesn't their magnificent and pathetic history show you that? If a Greek can't find anyone else to fight, he'll fight his neighbour. The other is the poverty of Greece, and to the very poor any creed that brings promise has a quick way to the heart."

I said, "I'll remember."

"Perhaps we've forgotten," he said, "what poverty means. When one sees—ah well, never mind now. But I think that most things can be forgiven to the poor."

I was silent. Here was this quiet, easy voice talking in the dark of past infamies, expressing as a matter of course the sort of enormous and tolerant compassion that I had never met—in the flesh—before. It came to me with a shock like an arrow out of the dark that—mystery or no mystery—I liked Simon Lester very much indeed.

He said, "What is it?"

"Nothing. Go on. The Germans shot Nikolaos, and Michael left."

"Yes. Apparently he moved out again into the mountains. After this point I know very little about what happened. So far I've pieced together the bare facts from what we were told after the war by one of the other B.L.O.s who was over here, and from the priest at Delphi, who wrote to my father some time back, when he was making his first inquiries."

"Didn't Stephanos write?"

"Stephanos can't write," said Simon. "What happened next we can only guess at. Michael went off back into the hills after the tragedy of Nikolaos' death. His shoulder wasn't fully healed, but he was all right. Stephanos and his wife wanted him to stay, but Nikolaos had left a small son and a daughter, and—well, Michael said he wasn't risking any more lives. He went. And that's all we know. He went up there—" a gesture towards the shadow-haunted mountain—"and he was caught and killed there, somewhere on Parnassus."

I said after a minute or two, "And you want to talk to Stephanos and find out where he is?"

"I know where he is. He's buried at Delphi, in a little graveyard not far from the studio, above the shrine of Apollo. I've been to the grave already. No, that's not what I want from Stephanos. I want to know just where Michael died on Parnassus."

"Stephanos knows?"

"He found the body. It was he who sent Michael's last letter, together with the other things he found on the body. He had them smuggled out somehow to this other B.L.O. and we got them eventually. We didn't know who'd sent them until later we were officially told that Michael was buried at Delphi. We wrote to the papa—the priest. He told us the simple facts, so, of course, my father wrote to Stephanos, and got a reply through the priest again, and—well, that seemed to be that."

"Until you saw Michael's letter."

"Until I saw Michael's letter."

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We had rounded a shadowy bluff and there ahead, pouring down the mountainside like a cascade, were the steep lights of Arachova.

The car drew gently in to the side of the road and stopped. Simon switched off the engine and reached into an inner pocket for a wallet. From this he took a piece of paper and handed it to me.

"Wait a moment till I get my lighter to work."

He held the little flame for me while I unfolded the flimsy paper. It was a scrawl on a single sheet of cheap paper, smudged as if with rain, a bit dirty, torn here and there along the old folds, and dog-eared from being read and re-read.

I opened it gently. I had the queerest feeling that I shouldn't have been touching it.

Dear Daddy, it began. Why should there be something so very endearing about the thought of Michael Lester, a tough twenty-seven, using the childhood's diminutive?

> Dear Daddy, God knows when you'll get this, as I see no chance of its getting taken off in the near future, but I've got to write. We've been having a bit of a party, but that's over now and I'm quite all right, so not to worry. I wonder, do you find this code of army-slang clichés as bloodily maddening as I do? At the best of times I suppose it has its uses, but just now—tonight—there is something I really want to say to you; to record, somehow, on paper—nothing to do with the war or my job here or anything like that, but still impossible to commit to paper and how *the hell* can I get it across to you?
>
> You know as well as I do that anything might happen before I see anyone I can send a private message by. If my memory were a little better—and if I'd paid a bit more attention to those classical studies—oh God, a world ago!—I might send you to the right bit in Callimachus. I think it's Callimachus. But I've forgotten where it comes. I'll have to leave it at that. However, I'm seeing a man I can trust tomorrow, and I'll tell him, come what may. And all being well, this'll be over some day soon, and we'll come back here together to the bright citadel, and I can show you then—and little brother Simon, too. How is he? Give him my love. Till that day—and what a day it'll be!
>
> Your loving son, Michael

The signature was a scrawl, running down almost off the page. Simon snapped the lighter out, and put the letter carefully away. He said, "You see what I mean? He really was under some strong emotion when he wrote that letter."

"I think I'd agree. I take it you've had a look through your Callimachus?"

"I have. He wrote a deuce of a lot. No, there's no clue there."

"And the 'bright citadel'?"

"That's a translation of a phrase the Delphic Oracle once used to Julian the Apostate. I think that must be the one he means. It refers to Apollo's shrine at Delphi."

We were moving again towards the lights of Arachova.

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" You used the word clue. Just what is it you are hoping to find, Simon? "

" What Michael found. He'd found something, Camilla." A tiny pause, and that electric thrill again, which quivered to nothing as Simon added flatly, " I'm pretty certain I know what it was, too, but I could bear to make sure. And for a start, I'd like to know just where Michael died, and how . . .

" Mick was the most casual-seeming devil to talk to that you ever knew. It took quite some time before you guessed that he was probably the toughest, too, and the most self-sufficient."

Like little brother Simon. The thought came to me so clearly that for one terrible moment I was afraid I had said it aloud. And I had an uncomfortable feeling that he knew just what I was thinking.

I said quickly and idiotically, " Here's Arachova."

It was one of the rather less necessary remarks. Already we were hemmed in by the crowding walls, and the coloured rugs almost brushed the sides of the car.

Simon parked in the place where the car had been that afternoon, and we walked back towards the steep alley-way where I had first seen him.

Opposite the foot of it was one of the village cafés, a dozen tables in a whitewashed room open to the road. Most of the tables were full. The men watched us. Or rather, they didn't look at me. They all watched Simon.

He paused at the foot of the alley and put a hand under my elbow. I saw that light, wary look touch the groups of dark-faced men, linger, leave them.

He smiled down at me.

" Up here," he said, " and watch where you go. The steps are tricky and the donkeys have provided a few extra natural hazards. Stephanos lives at the very top."

I looked up.

The alley was about four feet wide and had a gradient of one in three. The steps were just too far apart and were made of sharp chunks of Parnassus with the minimum of dressing. The donkeys—a herd of healthy donkeys—had been that way many times. There was one dim light halfway up.

For some reason it occurred to me at that moment to wonder just what I had got myself into. ELAS, Stephanos, a man called Michael dying on Parnassus and lying bleaching to earth again above Delphi.

All this, out of nowhere, and now a steep, dark little alley and the pressure of Simon's hand on my arm.

" Avanti," said Simon beside me.

I wondered sharply just what we were going to learn from Stephanos.

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★ ***The second part of My Brother Michael appears in next month's Argosy***

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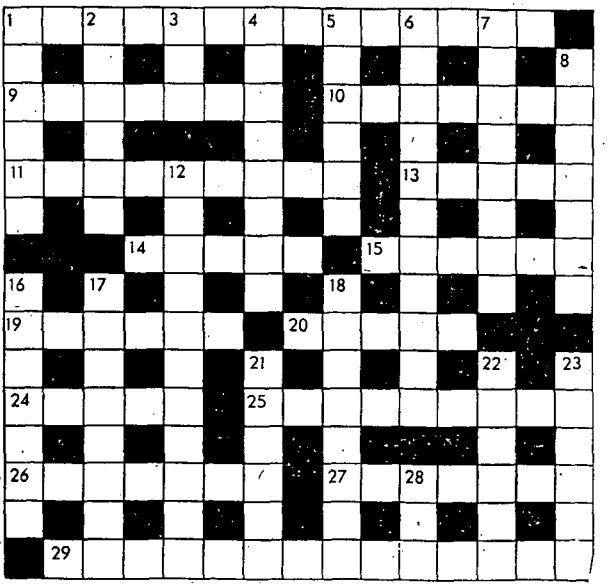
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 95

★



CLUES

Across

1 Miss Darling, Miss Fields, and the Princess ? (3, 5, 6).

9 Serf, ailing in vein (7).

10 Apply for E.S.P. in bill (7).

11 Beware, Len ! Upset, it can be repeated (9).

13 Add nearly all for whole sum (5).

14 Ghostly heads of hair ? (5).

15 Plurally goes with snakes (6).

19 Ruffian ends in pain (6).

20 Protégés under lock and key ? (5).

24 O rich mixed band of singers (5).

25 See you later (9).

26 This cavalryman's nothing more than a monster (7).

27 Disraeli's crusader (7).

29 She's seen on the boards, not heard (7,7).

Down

1 There's one in the town (6).

2 Join torch, maybe ? (6).

3 Tool for a Plymouth Brother? (3).

4 Peered, as it were (8).

5 Big reverse to gamble on the gallows (6).

6 Pure-bred dog—*not* a cross of Lorraine (8, 3).

7 Smooth sea-water at this time ? (8).

8 Blithe spirit, and he sounds it (7).

12 Does he foretell foul weather ? (11).

16 Waterfall starts with Caesar's foe (7).

17 Nature god in view (8).

18 Italian port (8).

21 "—— to right of them, —— to left of them" (Tennyson) (6).

22 Suffer hunger with a sailor inside (6).

23 Steep social slopes ? (6).

28 On ice, this negative's a sign (3).

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